

The Colloquy



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The Colloquy

Conversations about the Order of
Things and Final Good, Held in
the Chapel of the Blessed St. John
Summarized in Verse
by Josiah Augustus Seltz

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ORDER OF CONVERSATIONS

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The Colloquy

THE COLLOQUY

CONVERSATION I

THE CHAPEL ** THE PASSING OF THE GODS

O PENSIVE Muse, that hast accompanied me
Through Nature's farthest wilds and solitudes,

In this secluded chapel, at our ease,
We may resume those meditations deep,
So long engaging us. Thou wilt permit,
May be, the presence of those come to share
The silentness; or speaking, wilt reveal
Something beyond the veil, if something is
To wait and suffer for.

And ye, good friends,
Here in retreat, if not too soon I come
To break upon your charming quietude,
Some things I would relate, of more would ask,
The Muse I have invoked so giving aid
With words appropriate.

The Colloquy

Once in these aisles,
As punctually as the day began,
Or noontide came, or eve, the people knelt,—
Meek penitents, their eyes suffused with tears,
Who at the seven stations and before
The Virgin's and the Savior's images
Asked pardon for their sins; when, happily,
At peace with the immortals, begged of them
Unstinted favors and the gifts desired.
As punctually priests and acolytes
Intoned their litanies and said the mass,
And chanted low their penitential Psalms;
While statues, pictures, crucifixes, fonts,
Confessional, and altar brought to mind
The saintly piety of former times
And miracles of old and martyrdom
For Holy Faith. There is not now what then
Seemed sanctity within these walls, since left
Thus destitute of sacred ornament
And air as empty of the hallowed words
And incense smoke. It is as Heaven and Earth,
Seen in the childhood of the human race,
Peopled with spirits and divinities,
Now empty of the supernatural.

Those pious worshipers lacked never once
A god or helpful saint of whom to ask,
While we, not trusting where we have not seen,
If asking any, ask of the Unknown,—
The silence whence all things that are have come,
Bringing our life, and silence whereto all
The myriads living hasten in return.

Conversation II

Once Heaven lay near to Earth, so very near
A tower might be built to reach to it ;
The azure depths, arched by a firmament
Of lucid adamant, on which were built
Secure its battlements and palaces ;
Or low it rested on the mountain-peaks,
But for men's fear not inaccessible.
Seeing almost they made it certainty,
Locating in it many a fair domain
And gladsome view—the passageway whereon
The race of happy gods passed to and fro.
And in those climes, what the security !
Where never storm-wind came, excessive heat
Or cold, or ever wasting age or want ;
Where none were ever sick, none ever died,
Drink what they would, or eat, or risk at arms ;
Finding no limit set to any joy,
No pain or penance laid on any vice,
Nor suffered one in conscience for his sin.
While piety in later time assured
That over the cerulean expanse
Changelessly permanent are widest realms,
Peopled by angels and the sainted dead.
And that disciple whom the Master loved,
In vision looked from Patmos' lonely isle
Into those empyrean heights and saw
A city which was built of glass and gold,
Its walls, adorned with gems the costliest,
Nor ever needing light of Sun or Moon,
God, dwelling in the midst, the light of it.

Even the unbelieving poet told

The Colloquy

How in an ecstasy he had beheld
The murky atmosphere asunder rent
Baring the deep inane to either pole,
So making visible those regions dreamed,
Celestial, summery, serene, sublime,—
Immortal, blissful, and delectable,
Where Love Divine and Primal Wisdom bide.
We look—no firmament is there, but space
Encircling us, unmeasured, undefined,
Illimitable depths the bath of stars,—
Octillion worlds and nebulæ spread out
Trillions of leagues, plane after plane in height.

And Heaven once spoke to men or gave them
signs,
So say the books and legends of the past,
And wood and vale and fount and hollow Earth
And Ocean's awful depths gave utterance
Of the divinities that dwelt in them.
But Heaven is silent in the later time,
And wood and vale and fount inaudible,
Nor hollow Earth, nor Ocean's depths respond;
And meaningless the omens, prodigies,
Presages, divinations, dreams, to which
Antiquity deferred its enterprise.
And dumb the oracle and mute the voice
Of prophet, sibyl, medium, pythoress,
Long heard at Shiloh, Delphi, Antioch,
Dodona, Cumæ, and in Lybian wilds.
Silent, as well, the awful mysteries—
Osirian, Mithraic, Isiac,
Cabiric, Orphic, Dionysian,

Conversation II

At Philæ, Susa, Lesbos, Argolis,
Eleusis, Samothrace, at Crete and Rome.
No wizard's incantation now transforms,
And there is none to work a miracle.
And seen no more the phantom warriors
In mustered lines march on the Moonlit clouds;
Nor comets, meteors, eclipses now
Forebode defeat, calamity, and death.
Does Heaven speak? the Chinese seer inquires,
Observes then: *The four seasons take their course,*
All things the while becoming, being placed
In order, but does Heaven say anything?
And we look up but never from the sky
Have sign or voice, only those awful depths,
The lonesome stillness of Infinity,
And flaming energies which speed their round.
Did childish superstition thus delude
The men of former times, or are ourselves
Materialized with our activities,—
Our occult faculties and spiritual,
By world and sense o'erlaid and atrophied?

Is it that we are blinded by the light
Invention brings? with our great telescopes
Behold the milliard worlds, but miss the scenes
In which our fathers found supreme delight?
That was a world far lovelier, methinks,
Which olden poets knew, than Earth is now,
And times, with which our own may not compare,
When men of Greece spoke in its purity
The language of the gods. And how unlike
Our world with its material interests,

The Colloquy

The sacred lands and constant providence
The Hebrews knew! of which tradition tells,—
Peniel, Haran, Moreh, Mamre's plain,
And holy mount where God appeared to them;
Unlike the wilderness where they were fed
By miracle—had manna for their bread
And quails for meat; out of the smitten rock
And cleft, the springs of water for their drink.

The past we may not bring, nor may the Earth
The ancient fathers knew again delight,
Since we have searched it out and looked beyond.
But comforting the hope they had: to walk
Sometime the Heaven as they had walked the Earth.

Ay, but the Heavens are empty as the world!
The firmament above is tenantless
And uninhabited of gods are all
The mountain-tops—Olympos, Kaf, Elboorz,
Seir, Sinai, Himala, and Ida's plain.
And seen no more, celestial visitants,
Walking the paths of that sequestered vale
Where Paris shepherded his snow-white flocks;
Nor in the dells of Ida's wood, as when
Athena, Aphrodite, Hera came
Before him in their native loveliness,
That he, most beautiful of men, might tell
Which of those queens immortal was most fair.
No more immortals in their festive halls,
At banqueting, resolve the fate of men:
No more their shadows rise in still abodes,
In light of Evening Star or the pale Moon;

Conversation II

Deserted their aërial palaces
And spacious caverns of the Underworld,
And spoiled the sacred groves and hallowed grounds.
No more their temples glisten at the dawn,
And broken now, or carried to strange lands,
Are their inimitably sculptured forms,
Perfect in beauty, grace, and majesty.
Asgard is empty of its revelers,—
Thor, Odin, Balder, Heimdall, Vithar, Tyr,
North gods who ruled the world so merrily.
And vacant, now, are Mount Sumero's thrones
Where once ruled the Four Regents of the Earth.
The mighty deities, Bel, Asshur, Zeus,
Varuna, Indra, Vishnu, Siva, Brahm,
Ormazd, Osiris, Amun, Neph, Khem, Pthah,
Pachacamac, and Tezcatlipoca,
With Elohim of Israel, are dead.
And gone are they, a numerous progeny,
To Superstition born and Fear and Dread,
Long aiding, though, the cunning, crafty priests,
And despotisms to hold their evil power;—
False, jealous, sensual, capricious gods,
Invested with our human littleness,
And greedy gods that begged for richest gifts;
Sullen, despotic gods, proud majesties,
And misshaped monsters, who, in lurid light
Of human sacrifice and orgies held,
And awful incantations, were appeased.
And gone with them Silenos, Bakchos, Pan,
Apollo, Cupid, Fro; Frost Giants, Elves,
And Genii, Harpies, Ogres, Goblins, Trolls,
The Graces and those fair divinities,—

The Colloquy

Napeads, Naiads, Meliads, Oreads,
Dwelling in groves, in vales, on banks of flowers,
In mountain mists, in fountains, silver streams.

Eden is lost to us; forever lost
Its Tree of Knowledge and its Tree of Life.
And disenchanted is the mythic world
Of Ithaka, and all the land of dreams.
And no one now seeks the Elysian Fields,
The Celtic island-valley, Avalon,
And no one, a terrestrial paradise,
Nor ever one again, those even climes
And sheltered vales where none grow old and die,
Or think to find again Saturnian rule.
And none now finds the ash-tree, Yggdrasil,
Whose leaves are green with an unwithering bloom,
And none the Fountain of Eternal Youth.
And uranographers may not behold
The peopled empires of the starry depths;
Nor has one now those easy liberties,
In Time and Space, that were the privilege
Of all the generations of the gods.

The natural alone is visible,—
The round of planets, constellations, suns;
Day following the night, the night the day;
And in their turn the seasons of the year.
And following, one after other one,
The toiling generations of mankind—
Changing and yet the same—phenomenon
Moving obedient to necessity

Conversation II

Or endless series of efficient cause,
Produced and reproduced continually.

Could we look back to the remotest past,
Or down to farthest point of future time,
We should but see unwearied Nature's course
In marking evolution of the worlds,—
Kosmos from chaos gathering the worlds
And worlds to chaos making their return,—
Lighting and darkening of countless suns,—
Innumerable creatures finding life,
Living their little day and perishing.

CONVERSATION II

THE HIDDEN CREATOR ** INQUIRIES

THE books have taught, and pious men believe,
That somewhere in the tract invisible
Resides a personal Intelligence,
Who reigns supreme throughout the Universe.
But where in Nature's course made manifest ?
When heard his voice in the affairs of men ?
And who, in his experience, has known him ?
Would not such high and mighty ruler show
Most signally his power in the world ?
Yet through our history the wrong persists—
Our misrule, robbery, and murdering,
Our sins, our vices, crimes, idolatries ;
As human might or selfishness controls,—
Ambition, lust, greed, hate, and vanity,
And not the mandate of Omnipotence.

And had Omniscient Wisdom broken once
The outer silence would there not have been
A revelation given to the world
Suiting such Author and Intelligence ?
But in our sacred books what fables, myths,
Inaccuracies, and disputed texts !

Conversation 11

Or, brought from Heaven, the revelation claimed,
Something of Heaven itself it should contain.
But what the silence, the omission here !

If from Eternity there was a scheme
To discipline mankind and educate
And save from sin, why was the plan of it
Revealed so bunglingly and partially ?—
Only to favored few in favored lands,
After those ages long of ignorance,
Of brutish savagery and heathen night,
When men, in multitudes beyond compute,
Had perished in their sins, which, even now,
The greater number living do not know ?
Or given to the few, as claimed, complete,
Infallible, why are those having it
Forever in dispute of what it is ?
If there is an Intelligence on high,
Is he not able to reveal himself
To men in way he may be understood ?
And of the things revealed, why has there not
Been something of the useful, practical,—
Plain truths for all mankind and moral light,
In record none would think of questioning ?
Like shipwrecked mariners, who grope their way
Up through the scarcely penetrable bush
Of Anticosta isle,—like traveler
Through maze of vine and branch in Tropic
wood,—
Like one alone in trackless wild at night,
Nor star, nor chart to guide, so we are left,
To find the knowledge that concerns us most.

The Colloquy

If God is and is love, would he not speak
Like a kind parent talking to his child ?
Yet those presuming to make known his will,
How sparing with the messages of love !
How plentiful with wrath, damnation, doom !
And only heretics think to proclaim
For man a larger hope and blessedness.
Thus Malachi and Paul proclaim the Word :
I hated Esau, Jacob have I loved.

And if Religion was designed to be
Our chief concern in life, our hope in death,
Why have such superstitions clouded it ?
Why still to idols joined ? to ignorance ?
Why to the Thrones of Darkness so allied
That in the progress of intelligence,
Science, Philosophy, and Poetry
Desert it in the search for truth and light ?

Or Heaven its prophets sent to teach mankind,
And saviors to redeem them from their sins,—
If Jesus, Gautama, Prometheus once,
Through sorrow, sacrifice, and suffering,
Atonement made to save a fallen race,
Why is the moral world so little changed ?
Sin baleful, ruinous, as at the first ?
As grievous and as troublous our brief life ?
Had these not come, had men not fared as well,—
Sickened and died and turned to dust as now ?

CONVERSATION III

OF LIFE, DEATH, AND FUTURITY ** INQUIRIES

WHAT problems these—our life, our destiny!
Engaging the acutest minds, the most
Profound in argument; none answering,
Not finding what the Kosmos has concealed.
If man is animal in his descent,
When, in the awful past, was it that first
Our ferine ancestors were humanized?
Or if divine, why is our Earthly life
Degraded thus in sense and perishing?
Or born immortal, why have we the fear
So constantly, so awfully of death?
If part of universal made alive,
How came the living to this little part?
And if to live is to be miserable,
Why do the very atoms will to live?
Or, if vast Nature is intelligent,
Why those tremendous crises, cataclysms,
Calamities, abortions, accidents,
That death immortal seems and not the life?
And grounded where the reason for our hope
In life eternal? Can the soul live on
Without material environment?—

The Colloquy

As individual, in a universe
Forever changing, and where everything
Sometime began and sometime must have end ?
And to what fate are all the living doomed,
When suns grow cold and lose their brilliancy
And planets their orbital energies ?

The boast of Paul, that the last enemy
Of man was conquered and was captive led,
And Milton saying, that the bitterness
Of death is past, have never had response
In Nature, nor have brought to piety
And sentiment a love and reverence
For the destroyer; still, as in the past,
There is the loathing and revolt of life
At dissolution,—always death a dread
Appalling presence, to the most devout,
As to the skeptic and the sensualist,
The one o'erwhelming terror of the mind.

And does Earth only wait deliverance ?
Is it not every habitable world
In space ? This very day was shown to me,
A fragment of a meteoroid that held
A diamond; another which contained
Resin or amber, indicating thus
Organic matter or vitality,
May be thrown from volcanoes on the Earth,
Beyond its atmosphere and now returned,
As falling cinders, but more probably
Come out of space, from some disrupted world,
And showing how death held dominion there,

Conversation 1111

Thus telling, as Earth's fragments sometimes will
To some far orb, her history of woe.
And is death visitant on every sphere ?
The star dust scattering alike the seeds
Of life and death ? Must some, in every world,
For others suffer pain and martyrdom ?
The innocent and harmless feed and clothe
The ravenous ? The weak hold up the strong ?
Has Mercury the story of the cross ?
Venus ? or Mars ? Do stars that now give us
Their fullest light, await the awful scenes
Of human sacrifice and agonies
Of their Gethsemanes ? Yet tragedy
Of Calvary and burning of their saints ?
And seen in every habitable sphere,
Earth's multitude of miseries and wrongs ?
And seen the great procession passing on,
As here in traveling through vale of tears,—
Numbers innumerable that war has slain
And famine, pestilence ; and numbers more,
Whom vice and want are hastening to their graves,
With those whom sickness, grief, and age destroy ?

Among the deeds and sayings marvelous
Attributed to Gautama, occurs
An incident, related first to show
His matchless wisdom, endless sympathy,
Since greatly prized and told in prose and verse,
In what, though, teaching us or comforting ?
A woman, so the tale divine proceeds,
Kisagotami named, whose child had died
And she had borne it in her arms, from house

The Colloquy

To house, in search of one that might heal it
Of death, was told at last to seek the one
Who might have medicine to help. To him,
The Buddha, then, thus sorrowing, she went,
Pressing yet closer to her breast her child,
The lifeless burden not less dear to her.
And he, what gave he in her awful need ?
Sent her away upon the idle quest—
To beg for mustard-seed, at any house
Where none had died—not husband, wife, nor child,
Nor slave. And the poor woman went her round,
Only to learn that every house had death
Its own; and only cure was this—to know
That death and sorrow is the lot of all.

For last and greatest ill none has the cure.
For thee, O Death, the charmer never moves,
Who hast not pity and who hearest not
The prayers of man to thee, nor Love's sweet speech,
Nor children's cry, nor woman's loud lament;
Nor carest for Earth's glory, wealth, or power.

And of the hope men have to live again
Either on Earth or in another world,
Mid joys unspeakable, as most believe,
Where is the evidence to make it sure ?
Ah, the uncertainty! a dream! a wish!

If death is not the end of consciousness,—
If all of those who lived are living still,
Inhabiting their realms of bliss or gloom,
Is it not probable, supposable,

Conversation IIII

That messages would sometime come from them ?
Or from among so great a company
Some one, if those realms be, return to us ?
But who such message had ? who entertained
Sometime such extramundane visitant ?

True, it is written that Elisha raised
The widow's son,—that Lazarus was called
To life,—that Er and Viraf lived again,
And that Empedokles with charms called back
The soul of Pantheia from death's cold trance,—
That Finnish magic Lemminkainen's life
Restored ; recovered from Manala's flood,
Dark, whirling, deep, in dread Tuone's realm,—
That Orpheus, taming the Infernal powers
With melody, as of Æolian strings,
Released from Hades sweet Euridike ;
Again had led her to the Thrakian vales,
Had he not looked around, the forfeiting,
Through love's solicitude, all he had dared,
For only with averted gaze he might
Return with her to Earth ;—that Herakles
Seized Dis with his strong arms and held him fast,
Till he had given promise to restore
Alkestis to Admetos' royal house ;
And that at Sardis Cæsar's shade appeared
To Brutus, sorely him disquieting,
And Theseus to the Greeks at Marathon ;—
That Jesus, risen from the tomb, appeared
To Mary Magdalena, to the Two
When going to Emmaus, afterward
To the Eleven, when they sat at meat.

The Colloquy

But those returned to life, soon after died,
Leaving no further record of themselves,
And those appearing never after came—
When coming, told not of another world,—
While none reanimates our own, and none
Of all the mighty dead appears to us.

And what is Earthly immortality ?
What to live in our deeds ? in others' lives ?
Of the first generations of mankind,
No deed of merit nor a single name
Has reached us, or has place in history.
And as the acts of men accumulate,
So one has lately written, only that
Which is supremely cosmopolitan
In its importance to the race, is held
In memory ; forgotten toil and tears
And martyrdom, the myriads of the dead
Who through the ages wrought,—that now are dust.

Not anything that man contrives endures.
Behold in ruins all the past ! mounds, tombs,
And desolations on the goodly sites
Of cities, palaces, in fertile vales.
As ruinous faiths, institutions, states :
See what the wrecks Time makes of monarchies,—
Egyptian, Median, Babylonian,
Assyrian, Parthian, Carthaginian,
Indian, Persian, Macedonian,
Scythian, Byzantine, Mogul, Saracen,
And Roman, proudest, mightiest of all.

Conversation 1111

This is the history of government,
Past empire, state, and nationality,—
The revolutions that have made its power,
The revolutions that have ruined it.

In vain thy pride, O man! Thy boasted power!
Thy regal splendor and thine affluence!
Thy conquests and dominion over Earth!
Since Death and Time make spoil of thee and thine;
Thy palaces, thy monuments, thyself,
Forever in the unseen vanishing.

In what has man the promise given him,
Sometime upon the Earth to realize
A perfect life and without pain and death—
The poet's dream and vision of the seer?
How many species have become extinct!
And our own race waits but the little while
The changeful Earth may give it sustenance,
The while the Sun in shrinking gives its heat,
The while the Earth is thickening its crust—
The time which it will take the thirsty rocks
To suck the waters of the Ocean up
And drain the atmosphere. Nor may we hope
Further to urge upon futurity
This mortal history. A little while
In time, as measured by eternity,
And urn and sepulcher will have their seals
With none to break, none to inquire of them.

The human race will have no heir to claim
What it accumulates. In hoary age

The Colloquy

It will be childless, wasted, desolate ;
Its toil and struggle through those ages long,
Its aspirations, hopes, all come to naught,
None pitying ; some scientist perhaps
On Jupiter, observing the dead Earth,
Will write of us,—of what we may have been,
As we of life on Earth's pale satellite.
Or further, searching out the kosmic dust,
Find some scant remnant of our extinct forms
To theorize on—wonder what we were.

A horrible uncertainty torments
Belief, since all that lives returns again
To lifeless elements : the elements
Themselves and habitable worlds disperse
As mists through the illimitable void,
Their energies to ether oceans given ;
Leaving no further vestige of their life
Nor theater for life in future acts,—
Our bones and stars then in a common pyre,
As Lucan says, reserved for the same fire.

CONVERSATION IV

THE CREATIONS OF ART, THEOLOGY, AND PHILOSOPHY

HOW weak, how dim, how earthly, sensual,
Our pictures of immortals—angels, saints,
Heroes, and saviors apotheosized!
How shadowy the realm of their abode!
How feebly do they touch reality!
How poorly suited all to the employ
And errands high to which we order them!
Will wings bear up the soul in passing space
Void of an atmosphere, or ever lift
Our bodies up to Heaven? This is presumed,
Though, in all sacred art—a clumsy folk
Girt with the pinions of the bird, and lo
An angel host! or chubby, laughing babes,
With winglets, and fat kherubs soar aloft!
The types of personages so produced
Thought to inhabit all the spirit realms.
Thus Cimabue represented them,
Visara, Veronese, Tintoret;
Thus Botticello, Reubens, Raphael,
Simone, Titian, Michael Angelo,
Velasquez, Duccio, Giotto; thus Van Eycks,

The Colloquy

Painting *the Adoration of the Lamb*.
With rainbow wings and golden aureole,
With vernal coverings and shadowless,
Fiesole, in his angelic choirs,
Invests the maiden, youth, and warrior,
The poet's heroes and his heroines.
Such company Corregio ranged about
The Virgin in the Holy Night ; around
Madonna and her Child in Glory ; thus
Murillo painted that great multitude
In *the Miraculous Conception* ; thus
Il Perugina winged St. Michael,
And Donatello's marbles reproduce
This freak anatomy. But whatso'er
These forms, of whom or what the counterfeit,
Whether the likeness of a blessed saint,
Or model, mistress, woman of the street,
No less faith looks to them and pious folk
Take seriously to heart these effigies
Nor once mistrust.

And woeful! pitiful!
If disembodied souls on day of doom
And at the sound of the archangel's trump
Should, from the loathsome graves, reclaim their
dust
And bear again this cumbrous weight of earth,
Yet this in the Apostles' Creed is taught,
Confessed by all throughout the Christian world.

As weak the forms of our divinities
And attributes ascribed to Deity.

Conversation 110

Spinoza, thou hast written much of God,
Hast said, *All is in God and God in all ;*
Besides whom nothing is to be conceived,
And nothing is, he does not bring about.
What the extent of being this includes !
Is everything in endless form and type,
All likenesses and all diversities—
Supremest mystery and paradox.
Is Providence and is malignant fiend ;
Is Heaven, is Hell,—is the Pure Principle,
Right, Justice, Mercy, and Redeeming Love,
Is Chance, Fate, Crime, Intrigue, Oppression,
Wrong,
Is all, is nothing, is the fruitful womb,
Is wasteful, loathéd death and woeful grave ;
The source of kindness, virtue, piety,
In man and what in him is brutishness.
So representing the Omnipotent,
The One all-wise, the One all-powerful,
As maker of the evil and the pain,
Himself of what he makes the sufferer.
And is this God ? Supreme Intelligence ?
Is he the worm crushed heedless under foot ?
The hunted, trembling animal at bay ?
The wounded, bleeding, dying on the field ?
The outcast, wailing, sinking in despair ?
The vile, the sinful, and the blasphemous,
Shaming his being and despising it ?
Was it his voice that from the cross cried out,
Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani ?

And Christian Theism, by what terms expressed !

The Colloquy

Patristic riddles in arithmetic,
Employed in argument and ritual;
As read: *Three Persons and one God*,—one God
But trinary or Trinal Unity.
And to impersonate God's sovereignty,
Taking an Oriental despotism
For type; with such capricious tyranny
Presumes to show his kindly attributes,
Love, Mercy, Justice, helping Providence;
Though when according him supremacy,
Eternal, absolute, permits in Heaven
Rebellion, and in Hell an enemy
Implacable and unsubduable.

How weak is all historic evidence
Relating to the supernatural!
The prophets, patriarchs, the saviors, saints
Fading, dissolving in the mythical.
What wisdom and what moral excellence,
Till late, to Adam were attributed!
Upon this name, now nothingness, depend
Our various structures of theology,
And elements of Orthodox belief,—
What is related of the Fall of Man
And of Imputed Guilt in consequence,
With doctrine of the Incarnation taught,
Of the Vicarious Expiation made,
And efficacy of the sacraments.
And what is our reliance on the past,
Though institutional religion still
Turns reverently to it for defense
And anchorage secure for future hopes?

Conversation IV

Broken are all its sacred promises,
And faiths and prophecies discredited.

How old, how erudite, voluminous,
Is our philosophy, and yet how weak,
How piteous its limits, ignorance,
Attempting knowledge of the Infinite!
Resting the most on some absurdity.
What has the wisest told us of ourselves
And of the cause of things and of their end ?
Ye learned Cosmographers and Physicists,
As many as would represent to us
The method of becoming of what is,
Or world, or life, or human consciousness,
Which had precedence in development,
Motion, or function, or intelligence ?
And was the world adapted to our use
By purpose, predetermining design,
Or were ourselves adapted to the world,
Through long selection and experiment ?

And, sage Pythagoras, how may the soul,
Full grown and old in its experiences
Of multitudinous endeavors, toils,
And mighty thoughts and weighty problems solved,
Take up its dwelling in the infant brain,
So puny, thoughtless, and expressionless ?
Or as Lucretius inquired of thee,
Do souls wait ingress in the germs of life
When they are generated, and contend
One with another for priority ?
Though we, in turn, may ask as much of him :—

The Colloquy

If, at a time, the atoms were engaged
In conflict for the prize of consciousness ?
For reason and the throne of Deity ?

Ye, too, learned Pundits and Theosophists,
When seeing how the body perishes,
Severed in parts or falls a putrid mass,
How reason ye, or by what sight possessed,
To claim an astral form, analogous
Though immaterial, survives this wreck ?

Plato, if what is immaterial lives,
What of ourselves and what we prize survives ?
What will our love be when these mortal forms
That are its treasures crumble into dust ?
Take from our senses now this touch of earth
And what remains beside to be desired ?

But found all of the old cosmogonies,
A motley web of fables, folk-lore, dreams,
Apocalyptic visions, and perhaps,
A grain of truth, not worth the sifting out.
And yet in what are our hypotheses,
The various suppositions we have made
About the cause and genesis of things,
Improved on those held by the ancient world ?

The argument of Paley proves too much
And makes a very drudge of Providence.
Or Nature shown to be an organism,
How feebly with her endless processes
Does our poor human handicraft compare !

Conversation 110

Spencer, great toil and wisdom thou hast given
In study of the cause and course of things,
Or nebulæ, or worlds, or forms of life,
The origin of customs, laws, and faiths;
Writing a comprehensive history
Of intellectual development,
Yet missing somehow what we most would know,—
The genius of the world which brings about
Whatso it wills—the *power not ourselves*
That makes for righteousness. For not alone
Through differentiation has accrued,
Or more complexity, the tendency
Of moral forces which advance the race,
Initiating epochal reforms
And enterprise extra-traditional.
And what idolatry is more absurd
Than worshiping of the Unknowable ?

And Darwin, how in thy Pangenesis,
Is the provision made for organisms
Of such great multitude and varied form,
With burden yet of every tendency,
Heredity and the experiences
Accumulating in the stream of life ?
For all, that thou hast written of descent,
The egg remains an unsolved mystery,
Holding in trust, this microscopic sphere,
Transparent, jelly-like, the life of Earth
Through untold million years; the life of man,
Continuing in those few racial types
From earliest traditions until now.
And other mysteries, as well, remain,—

The Colloquy

Thy scheme as it includes psychology
And ethical development of man.
For wherein have the selfish instincts helped
To what is noblest, saintliest in life ?
In these alone have we the reason found,
Why men in every land, in every age,
Have honored certain virtues,—kindliness,
Or prudence, rectitude, fidelity,
Denial, chastity, and temperance,
The heroisms the most and altruism ?

All ye, Neo-Lamarckian naturalists,
With what you teach us of heredity
And of the influence of environment,
How little do your several schemes provide
For the surprises and the accidents
Occurring through our human history !
And from the very first in what is changed
The moral constitution of mankind ?

In Ethics and Religion, as applied,
What signal failures seen in every age !
How many are our precepts, preachments, rites,
Our disciplines and schemes to perfect us !
And numberless our platforms and ideals,
Perennial agitations and reforms
Engaging every sin and social wrong ;
As numberless our laws restricting crime.
But are our evils less ? Men put down wrongs
And tyrants,—other wrongs and tyrants rise.
We conquer one disease, another one
Defies our medicine and quarantine.

Conversation IV

We strive to banish crime and poverty,
But life and property, how insecure,
Save for police and constant vigilance
With cost of lock and vault! while beggars swarm,
And almshouse, jail, and penitentiary
Are crowded full. In lands most civilized,
How great is the invested interest
Of vice—drink, gambling, sensuality!
And fearful is the aggregate account
Of vagrance, libertinage, drunkenness.
What scandals in our current news! And full
Our calendars with acts of violence.
In work what shams, evasions, and deceits!
In trade what cheatings, insincerities,
And what dissembling in our social life!
And covered by respectability
What moral rottenness and brutality!
How thoughtless, careless often, Christian men,
Of public virtue and of sacred trusts!
Or holding honor little in esteem.
One robs a bank and one the government,
One steals the earnings of great companies
And one the widow's and the orphan's goods,
As careless of official purity
And honest politics the most of men.
What party but would fatten on the spoils?
What legislature, but is bought and bribed
By some monopoly or syndicate?
And who, in public life, will put aside
The claim of party or of private gain
For statesmanship and service to mankind?
And where is the municipality

The Colloquy

That is not ruled by its worst elements?
What popular election held without
Intimidation, bribery, and fraud ?
What people's party but has been betrayed ?
What laborers' society not wrecked
By its dissensions, or to ruin led
By oily and self-seeking demagogues ?
In every land the many still complain
Of inequality, injustice, wrong ;
The few presuming still to own and rule,
As Theodosius' heirs divide the world,
Or still to keep their privilege and power,
Subordinate and rob the multitudes,
While widely yet the savage dominates
The habits and the polity of men.
How frequently is the appeal to arms
E'en by the subjects of the Prince of Peace !
The Christian nations are the militant,—
See Europe's armaments and soldiery,
And hear her rumors and her cries of war !
What weighty problems, tenure of the land
And press of population on the means
Of its subsistence ! Statesmen, moralists,
Economists, and theologians wait
Solution of these yet and remedy.
What questions these in domesticity
Presented by our modern industries !
In economics, too, what problems raised
By corporations, syndicates, and trusts !
Like highway robbers in the olden time,
Who asked a fee of all that carried corn
And merchandise, or Bedouins, who ask

Conversation IV

As if in right of every caravan,
So these upon the products of our fields
And factories,—our earnings, purchases,—
Our fuel, light, and fare when traveling
Lay their percentages and make demands.
What vexing problems for the publicists
Of the enlightened world the Asian hordes,
Restless for migratory enterprise,
Or arming now, soon to dispute in war,
Western possession and supremacy!
And still, as at the first, confronting us
The problems of man's sin and ignorance:
Our means and wills so little adequate
To the world's need, still less, our faith and love.
How largely, yet, Religion is maintained
By privileged, immemorial beggary!
Nor common sense nor business principles
Serving our missions and benevolence.
What effort needed yet to Christianize
The vast unyielding Heathendoms of Earth!
What labor to uplift and educate
The retrograding people of our towns!
Sunken in gloomy, sodden misery,—
Degenerate as those low forms of life
Inhabiting the sunless depths of seas.
And what the labor yet to humanize
The mindless matadore and pugilist,
The vile procuress and those brutal men,
Unprincipled and cunning, who but live
To brutalize and to degrade their kind!
And where is the imputed righteousness,
Atoning for the sins of ages past ?—

The Colloquy

The wanton murders and licentiousness,
Common to all the ancient despotisms ?
Of those amazing sensualities
To Syrian and Chaldean worship joined ?
Or the Seleucian depravities
And lechery of the Byzantine kings ?
The horrid treacheries, shames, guiltiness
Of the incestuous house of Ptolemy,
And dissoluteness of imperial Rome,
Or the abominations, crimes, and sins
Of Italy while under Papal rule ?
Whose love put out of memory the deeds
Of Herod ? Judas ? Israel's high priest ?
Of Borgia, Bobadilla, Robespierre ?
Of Mocenigo ? Where the altruism,
To hide the motiveless malignity
Of an Iago, and the tyranny,
As motiveless and inexcusable,
Of Dionysius ? of Domitian ?
Of Periander ? Physcon ? Marius ?
Of Nero, England's Richard, and those kings
Whose memory, whose glory, is their crimes ?
What font for moral healing purify,
Louis XV., the Defender of the Faith,
And his vile bawds and mistresses ? or those,
The shame of history—lewd Rhodope,
Læna, Lais, Phryne, Claudius' wives,
Leontium, profligate Merozia,
The lustful spouses of the Antonines
And her who matched the wit of Perikles,
Or her whom Belisarius took to wife ?
What the new birth, that could regenerate

Conversation IV

Aurelius' profligate and cruel son,
Or shameless, swinish Elagabalus ?
What masses said and what indulgence bought
Will take Fonseca's blame from memory ?
Or ever Ferdinand's ingratitude ?
What rite the Law or Church prescribes avail
To cleanse from blood the house of Constantine ?
What expiation ever made, redeem
A Catherine de Medicis or those
Who held the office of inquisitors ?—
De Torquemada ? Valdez ? Dominic ?
Or that Genevan Protestant, austere,
Illiberal, who did not think to spare,
Even where Rome had spared, the cell and flame ?
What moral effort change the destiny
Of one, like Œdipos, to evil born,
Or like Sextus Tarquinius, to life
Of villainy ? What penance named restore
To innocence, to love, to happiness,
A Beatrice Cenci, forever set
Apart in sorrow from all of our kind ?
Or that adulteress, whose luckless life
Brought countless woes to Greece, to Ilium
Its ruin ? Or, if offering excuse,
How free from their reproach those who have held
Through every age, their evil memory ?—
The vain, voluptuous Semiramis,
Fabled of old as despot to have sat
On Ninus' throne in Babylonia ;
Of Phædra, Klytæmnestra, Jezebel,
And that Philistine harlot who betrayed
The great deliverer of Israel,

The Colloquy

Her blame accumulating with the years,
Where'er the dismal tragedy is told;
Or those supreme in cruelty and vice—
Fiendful, dehumanized Caligula,
Dona Urraca, shame of shameless Spain,
Philip II., of unfathomed crimes,
And Timon, pinnacled in solitude,
O'er wasted worlds and millions of his slain.

And ethics in our later theories
In what confusion as to right and wrong!
Conscience dethroned and old-time principle,
And cunning, prudence, and expediency
Exalted as the mentors of the race,
Or right is made the synonym of might,
While wrong and crime and vice and sin consist
In what turns loathsome or is profitless;
Justice, in what is most advantageous,
And duty, in what is agreeable.
And law is found in Rob Roy's *good old rule*,
As Wordsworth put in verse: *that they should take*
Who have the power, and they should keep who can;
Or let each follow his own interest.

And what is justice in the Universe?
Is it that we are to be comforted
By this materialistic argument,—
That every individual but receives
The benefits and evils which arise
Of his own nature, and hence must endure
The pains and sacrifices consequent?
Or is it as the Optimist asserts,

Conversation 110

That, in the present world, each one receives,
In measure microscopically true,
Award and penalty as is deserved ?
There is the loss Time never compensates,
The wrong no Earthly justice ever rights.
Countless the debts not canceled at the grave!
Countless the claims the world has not yet paid!
Vast the accounts sent to futurity!
What numbers robbed of goods, of right, of life,
Of liberty, not compensated yet!
Esau of birthright and of blessing robbed
And Naboth and Uriah robbed and killed;
Columbus, through the innocent mistake
Of a geographer, denied the name
Of his discoveries, and Swammerdam
And Owen cheated of deserving claims
To memory,—with millions who have toiled
But to enrich their masters or the few
Of greater wit—themselves of naught possessed.
And what the proud appeal of innocent,
To farthest ages and eternities
And yet unseen intelligence, to judge
Their acts, and trusting they will be approved ?

But so our culture tends, the while proclaims
The gospel of despair and bafflement—
Searches and delves to very uttermost,
To find the underlying course of things,
Instable, vanishing as in all else.
Pursuing still the dismal theme, lays bare
All sacred usage, all solemnities,
The roots of modesty and filial love,

The Colloquy

Of conscience, honor, duty, patriotism,
The origin of worship and our laws;
Or it brings low all the moralities
And the humanities that were the joy
And boast of pious men, in which they found
The proof of intuition and the voice
Of Heaven. Nor have we ground to controvert—
For what is barbarous or villainous
But sometime had the sanction of mankind ?

Ah! with the banished gods we leave behind
Many a shrine where piety reposed,
And old enchanted circles and the scenes
Of deeds heroic, venturesome, whence rose
The legends dearer to our hearts than gold:
Putting behind us far the saintly lives
And kindly fellowships of Faith and Love;
Farther and farther from us those pure ones
Who neither did nor ever thought the wrong.
Weep, you, if Heaven itself is of the past,
Rejoice, if all the hells are covered up.

CONVERSATION V

OF PRAYER AND RESEARCH

ST. CHRYSOSTOM has said that nothing is
So powerful as prayer; things difficult
It easy makes and renders possible
Impossibilities. But seldom now
The Christian prays with such full confidence.
E'en Catholics, of late, with half a heart
Invoke the Virgin and their patron saints—
As one pays tribute to formality
Repeat their rosaries and manuals,
Expecting not an answer when they ask.
And none receives reward as men report
The ancient fathers and elect obtained.

O godless, faithless, prayerless, lately one
Has written, so reproves our unbelief,
But how may one though praying hope to change
The natural occurrence of events,
Or forces, laws, that are immutable ?
Not for our asking, do we gain the stores
Which Nature has in keeping for our use,
But as we wrest from her and subjugate.
Or she bestows her gifts impartially :

The Colloquy

Alike upon the evil and the good,
She sends her blessings and calamities;
Alike to each she gives the vernal rain,
Soft sunshine, limpid dew, and balmy breeze,
The full-eared harvest and the melting fruit.
The ocean breeze propels the pirate's sails,
As surely as the peaceful merchantman's,
While darkness shields the thief and murderer,
The stealthy marches of invading foes,
As often as it shelters innocence,
Or covers the advance of patriots
And their retreat, or flight of fugitives.

And who, for asking, has obtained the aid
Of unseen powers and companionship ?
And what intelligence is known to us,
As supra-human, to which one can say
Consistently, *My Father*, or, *My Friend* ?

And has one for his genius, industry,
Wisdom, or piety yet made advance
Upon those boundaries that have defied
The race from the beginning, or has had
Insight or revelation from those depths
Concealing First and Last and Cause of All ?

Man lives enveloped in the mystery
Of his own being, seeks but never finds
The object of his search ; sinks in the grave
And leaves the secret of himself untold.

What have his weary speculations, plied
Through the long generations, won for him ?

Conversation V

And what his supplications to High Heaven ?
Inquirer I, myself, have been how long !
Of every science asking and of faith,
Of wise philosophy and occult lore ;
Explored the deep ravines, the rifts and mines,
And called the ancient rocks as witnesses
To tell how Earth's foundations first were laid ;
Delved in salt-lick, in shell-heap, midden, cave,
Peat, drift, and marl, in quest of the remains
Of extinct animals and vestiges
Of man and art in pre-historic times ;
Lifted from mounds their crumbling skeletons
And calcined bones and bits of pottery ;
The sea's depths dredged for ancient forms of life
And searched in slime, silt, stagnant pool, and mold,
For microscopic animalculæ
And living germs—in protoplasmic mass,
For origin of the whole living world.
And I have analyzed the light of stars
And numbered their component elements,
But nowhere found the secret I have sought—
Whence I have come and whither I must go.

CONVERSATION VI

OUR DREAMS, ASPIRATIONS, AND CONJECTURES

WHERE we have questioned, doubted, and
denied,
How earnestly the fathers once believed!
But how was it the fathers came to have
Those notions of the supernatural?
What led them, at the first, to think themselves
Immortal and descendants of the gods?
Was it a reminiscence of the soul?—
Gleams of the archetypal loveliness
In previous stages of existence seen?
An intuition? Or of Reason born
With the Eternal Reason having part?
Was it from the phenomena of dreams
Hallucination, trance, or sorcery?
A wish, a fancy, parent to the thought?
Fools! childlike, would they thus defraud them-
selves?
Thus passively submit to be deceived?
Or superstitious build their faith on dreams?
But how came they to dream those dreams? And
how
Entrance all after with the vision seen?

Conversation VI

Our dreams are but reflections of things real:—
One, looking in the water, sees oneself
And all about the stream reflected there,
But can the water mirror what is not ?
And can it be that what the saintliest
Believed, what most delights and satisfies,
Comforts the most and most for good has won
Through love, through self-denial, heroism,
Is not so much as shadow or a dream ?

If for the Earth alone, for the Earth's end,
Why has man shown such effort to maintain
And to extend his moral dignity ?
And whence his loyalty to duty, right,
And principle, in scorn of consequence,
Or exile, prison, or the stake and cross ?
Why with those tireless energies endowed ?
Or given those aspirations and ideals,—
Love of the beautiful and spiritual ?
The sense of God ? of Heaven ? the Perfect Life ?

Has the unconscious risen to these heights
To fall again in lifeless, silent dust ?
All living forms, when kosmically viewed,
But superficial, fleet phenomena,
Produced by solar radiation on
The outer crust of cooling nebula ?
Our reasoning, our memory, desire,
And love, but wasted psychic energies ?
This semblance of immortal and divine,
Illusion only, cheating hope and faith ?—
Voices that speak, that echo for a while

The Colloquy

Till fainter grown and farther ones shall miss
Of hearing them,—and Time, Eternity
Speed on, and bear nor speech nor record thence ?
And is the work of man less permanent
Than that the coral builds within the deep,
Doomed sooner as himself is to decay ?
And meaningless his endless sacrifice,—
The woe, the pain, the righteousness attained ;
Sharing Earth's accidents, oblivion ;
The Universe as little knowing us,
As we know of the life of other worlds ?

Earth treasures long her gems, her minerals,
Her ancient rifted crust, detritus, drift,
Her earliest dead through immemorial years,
As seen in sedimentary rocks, bogs, caves,—
The monstrous skeletons of extinct beasts,
The insect's gauze-like wings, the mollusk's shell,—
Forms fossilized or in the rocks impressed,
Even the carcass of the mastodon,
Found perfect still in the Siberian ice.
And is the power by which the Earth subsists,
Less careful of the best that dwells on it ?
Or Nature, holding without any loss
Through ever-changing form her elements
And energies, will she not keep conserved,
As well, her immaterial agencies,—
Our consciousness, our reason, memory ?
And is it thinkable that consciousness
Should ever perish in the Universe ?
For stupid, blind, must be the demiurge
To toil those million years in bringing forth

Conversation VII

Intelligence, and then thus foolishly
Destroy it just when it is perfected.

Did Nature, bringing us to life on Earth,
Make but the poorest of all her attempts ?
Or, having raised us to be wise as gods,
Will she have power again to put us down ?
And may there not be something greater yet
Than consciousness, as we experience it ?

And may there not be an Intelligence,
With whom our race had been a thought before
The Earth and Sun had form, or found their course?
That thought in us survive when Earth and Sun
Fail of their energies and pale and die ?
One conversant with every thought of man
And all the vast procession of events ;
Alike familiar with the flaming star,
The atom and infinitesimal cell
And with succession of phenomena
Throughout the Astronomic Universe ?

If One thus conversant with all exists,
Is it as person in relationship
With every order of intelligence ?
Of men the Father, Providence, and Judge ?
Or is he dwelling in some mighty orb,
Where round all spheres, the Universe revolves—
A silent, lone, eternal majesty,
Commanding by his laws, in silence given,
To worlds, to elements, and sentient forms ?
Or has he place in some ethereal realm,

The Colloquy

High over all the deep cerulean vault
Or the illimitable depths from which
The dazzling stars look down on us at night,
So beautiful, so lonely, sorrowful,
Seen in the awful mystery of space ?
Who is though all else ends, changeless amidst
The changeful Earth and changeful Heaven above ?
So isolate in his Infinity,
His silence our weak praise may never break,
Nor prayer for help, nor moan from sorrowing,
Nor wail of agony that fills the Earth ?

Is he, in all, inherent, immanent,
The visible, a vesture hiding him—
His living garment, he expressed in it ?—
His attributes as Paracelsus taught,
Sown through the substance of the Universe
That gathered slowly into types of things,
The rudimentary organs, limbs, and nerves,
Combining, struggling upward into one—
The noble structure and the brain of man ?
As boundless being, every lesser form
Includes, while the minutest thing contains
Him in completeness; God so dwelling in
Whatever is and everything in him ?

Ourselves, if mind, if character survives
These wasting tenements and world of change,
What will we yet become ? What ventures make
In the vast wilderness of glowing spheres ?
Shall we, reborn, take mortal shape again
Or live the shadow of our former selves ?

Conversation VII

Or our true selves become, the masks removed ?
As exiles from the Earth, will each one take
His solitary way ? or from our own
Will we some friendly recognition gain ?
Or share Love's longing, sweet expectancy—
Immortal union without change or death ?

The Spirit answers not, nor Providence,
Nor voice from the invisible, unknown :
Nor has experience yet acquainted us,
Through all our research and imagining,
With other than these natural verities,—
Presentments of the varied modes of force ;
As all that can be or that rules in all,
An Infinite, Eternal Energy,
Unaskable, unseeing, pitiless.

CONVERSATION VII

ABOUT THE KEEPER OF THE INN, WITH OTHER
INQUIRIES

I

WHAT is our life ? a breath ? a force ? a flame ?
Or is it an eternal principle ?
Soul that out of the heaven of heaven first came,
Or animated kosmic particle ?

And was our taking life a curse ? a doom ?
A fall from some fair, sinless paradise ?
For some past sin, sent down to world of gloom ?
Or lowest born, to Godlike reason, rise ?

Whence have we come ? Whereto our journeying ?
I asked of one who this sad answer gave :
We are Earth's generations, traveling
Our mournful journey downward to the grave.

Pilgrims, sojourners all like Abraham,
In this vast inn where none the keeper knows ;
Where never guest has written whence he came
And none may tell the place to which he goes.

Conversation VIII

Ah it is strange, that of the multitude
Living on Earth, no one has ever known
Him who keeps all, or clothes, or gives them food,
Whom all would as their Lord and Father own!

II

Not one here knows the author of his being,
Nor one the providence that daily feeds
All life. Nor know we if the one purveying
Takes cognizance of us and of our needs.

For never has he sent one to reveal
If we are known to him whose guests we are,
Or if our praises reach him and appeal,
Or if of any he has thought or care.

In prayer China's ancient king confessed :
Afar in the high Heaven God listens not.
And hears he one on Earth howe'er distressed
Or changes ever any mortal's lot ?

If never seen by one and never known,
And never one from him had answer yet,
As well might we address a vacant throne
Or have for God, inexorable Fate.

III

We know not our own life ; what lies beyond
Still less, for never to our questioning
Does an unquestionable voice respond,
Nor tidings from lost ones do any bring.

The Colloquy

Still to the One Unknown we make our prayer,
Look up to Heaven as to a far-off home :
And still we say of them, *They must be there—*
Dear friends that come not, never, never come.

How fares it with the happy dead? asks one.
Fares well, who lives ? fares better, if no more ?
If ever soul through Death's dark door passed on,
Was it to good or ill ? To be no more

Is painless. Ah ! to what inquiry these ?
To sorrows that await each one at birth,
To life burdened with countless miseries,
Nor solve *the riddle of this painful Earth.*

The most would live again ; and memory,
Even of all Earth's sorrows and distress,
They would keep green in Heaven through Endless
Day,
Slighting their kindest friend—Forgetfulness.

If memory retain each deed and thought,
Our struggles, failures, losses, sense, and shame
Of sin, our blighted hopes, then dearly bought
What from oblivion most we would reclaim.

Or if forgotten all of former things,
Our thoughts, our love, desire, companions,
friends,
Whate'er on Earth the highest pleasure brings,
As well not live ; with these the longing ends.

Conversation VIII

One said, *They are not into marriage given*
But as the angels are. Will our loved there
Pass us unknown? What then the bliss in Heaven,
If strangers all, who once were kindred here?

Unto the fathers gathered, epitaph
Aryan and Semite wrote, to history
Trusting their dead with such brief paragraph—
A name,—all else forgotten. Who were they?

What record made that time will not efface?
What noble name or deed, that now appears
In the collected annals of the race,
Will be remembered hence ten thousand years?

Shall in the grave thy love be known, in death
Thy faithfulness? Despair of Israel!
Despair of man! who when the vital breath
Quits him is dust like any cast off shell.

What dread Death brings! How dismal, dark the
tomb!
But Love in vision shows those robed in white,
Who like the hosts that dissipate night's gloom,
Illumine all with soft celestial light.

They live, dear ones! the vision fades away.
Vanished the golden New Jerusalem!
Our hearts beat low. Faith reassures; *They may*
Not come to us but we may go to them.

The Colloquy

And what is Love ? Faith ? Hope ? Ah what is
this,—

Not moved by doubt, not hushed by argument ?
Still promises reunion, Heaven's sweet bliss,—
Trusts on and in its trust finds full content.

But woe is faith in nothing made secure,
Bridge without mooring o'er a torrent laid,
That doth confiding pilgrim onward lure,
Where Death such certain pit for him has made.

IV

If God has given promise to the just,
That holy one shall not corruption see,
Why with the beasts do they go down to dust,
Sharing Death's ruin with them equally ?

If, in his providence, he cares for Earth,
Numbers our hairs and counts each sparrow's fall,
Cares he for withered germ or for misbirth,—
The blighted life, marred, sinful, criminal ?

Does he, as creeds assert, the wicked doom
To wail and woe, in ever-burning fire ?
Forbid the thought ! Conjecture has no room
To charge the Infinite with ceaseless ire.

If saving all, what will we yet attain,
Progressing as most pleasing in his sight ?
Will all at last the pure and perfect gain,
And *highest, holiest, happiest delight* ?

Conversation With

Or having found the Heavenly Paradise,
Our dead, from those transcendent heights above,
Do they look down on us with gladsome eyes,
Or pitying or greeting with their love ?

Or wait they on enchanted shore till there
We join them, now a disembodied race ?
Or are their shades as mists borne on the air ?
As unsubstantial, melting into space ?

Or merged their life in kosmic energy,
Impersonal and inarticulate—
Unconscious in their immortality ?
Or in their graves the angel's trumpet wait ?

Or are they near us, whom we think so far
Away ? Now lovelier than ever eyes
Of flesh beheld ? Do our gross senses bar
The pure from us ?—the heaven that so near lies ?

And if so near, why do they not make known
Their presence ? us from grief and doubt relieve ?
Ah, had our constancy been better shown !
If knowing, them our acts must often grieve.

They, who erewhile with us on Earth have talked,
Or sung to us their songs of joy and love,
Or ate with us, or slept, or sat, or walked,
If they are angels now in Heaven above,

The Colloquy

Were they not angels here ? Ah, not to know
What prize was ours, in friendship, to possess !
That might have lighted them of many a woe,
Heartache and tears and bitterest distress.

The poet argues : so it should have been,
We keeping such pure, blessed company,
As when the gods dwelt on the Earth with men,
Or came or went oft on their starry way.

V

Long the inquiry : answer there is none
For none we ask the awful silence breaks—
There is no voice from an eternal throne,
No speech from one that from the dead awakes.

CONVERSATION VIII

THE SEER'S WARNING

I ENDED my discourse about the gods
Who held their ancient thrones with absolute
Authority some few brief periods,
As by the æons measured, and then fell,
Conquered, discarded—written of as myths.
But my inquiry further still pursued
Of man who rises out of mystery—
Toils, suffers, into mystery sinks back;—
Asking the learning, faith, and piety
And reverend experience of mankind,
To tell the meaning of our pilgrimage
Here in the troubled order of the world.

Of those who in the Chapel met with me
A seer was first to take my problems up.
“ Yea, thou shalt know,” he said. “ It will be
told
To thee. Or thou unweariedly shalt seek,
Till past eternities yield up to thee
Their secrets and thy quickened sight receives,
What now futurity hides from thy view.
But earnest as thy quest, if at this hour

The Colloquy

Thou couldst know all, long would be thy complaint—

Wisdom disquiets more than ignorance,
E'en when it pleases him who learns. Moreo'er
The real truths about our origin
Are tales more fearful than the poets told
Of Earth's dæmonic life and monstrous birth,—
Dreadful, unspeakably, and awful truths.

If, as thy wish, thou couldst go back in time
To the beginning of all life on Earth,
Or dwelling place of the first human pair,
There to hold converse with thine ancestry,
Think not that they would have account for thee,
Which would be to thy liking. Œdipos
Routed the Sphinx, telling the dark-winged Muse
The meaning of the riddle she put forth,
Ending her crime; revealing, too, his own,
Since Fate had doomed, through knowledge of
himself,
To bring on him the worst calamities.
Such riddle still the Past propounds to us;
Whoever tells the truth of what we are,
Tells, ever afterward, a tale of woe."

CONVERSATION IX

THE CRITIC'S WARNING ** LIMIT OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

A CRITIC next took up the theme, but first,
Pronounced Faith and Philosophy accursed;
Blamed me for prying thus continually
In this perplexing, nightly mystery.

“ Think’st thou,” said he, “ to open now the seal ?
What past eternities have hid reveal ?
Or in thy research happily to find
What still eludes the wisest of mankind ?

Trust not thy dreams. It is not certainty
Where but thine own conjecture pleases thee.
Nor is truth fixed by creed or sacred name,
Or that the source is hidden whence it came.

Nor take what the great multitudes receive
As truth, nor what most pious ones believe;
With such solemnity no fact is told,
As myths and legends and traditions old.

The Colloquy

The Greeks and Romans told so well their lies,
We read them as authentic histories;
Chaldeans, Hindus, Jews, their myths so framed
That, *Very Word of God*, we have them named.

Fear, too, what learning boasts, presumption
more:—
Small yet is truth's accumulated store.
But, without bidding, come those who would tell
Of all there is in Heaven, of all in Hell.

Presuming priests, with stately liturgy,
And form and phrase of gracious piety,
And sanctimonious sermon and the look
Of reverential awe on holy book,

Affect to know the supernatural
And occult knowledge, hidden, spiritual,—
What common minds could not unaided see:
But ask of them—they know no more than we.

What know they, with all revelations given,
Either of God of angel or of Heaven ?
Of Time's beginning or creative plan
Or origin or destiny of man ?

Nor seer, nor yet mahatmas, has revealed
What the primordial energies concealed—
Problems for all, which philosophic lore
Resolves and leaves just where they were before.

Conversation 11

One prays, *Tell us, kind Father, what are we?*
Himself unto himself such mystery;
Another asks the animals to give
Account to him of how he came to live.

Another, scorning his poor mother, Earth,
Asks the far stars where first his soul had birth;
Scorning to die, asks if there is a place,
Changeless, inhabited by deathless race.

Proud Science claims all knowledge as her own
But sets her hedges close about the known;
Gives the old ignorance another name,
Its dark dominion leaving still the same.

And saintly and believing ones but see,
As in a mirror, darkly, what will be;
Behold in faith what will not come to sight,
In hope what else were veiled in endless night."

CONVERSATION X

THE WORLD OF WRONG AND PAIN

AN eremite next took my problems up,
First warning me as did the other two,
Then of the World of Wrong and Pain conversed—
Of Chance and Fate pronounced his deep complaint.

I.

“ As if Earth had not ill enough,” he said,
“ Thou wouldst ask those in Heaven, those in the
 hells,
If any there have voice, to tell their woes—
Phantasms as here who think them egoisms;
As some to Hades ventured long ago,
The Ionian, Mantuan, and Florentine,
Perchance to hear the wail of agony
Of lost souls in that cavern dolorous,
How full the lamentable tale as told
In human history! or seen by us
The universal spectacle of wrong,—
The unrequited toil, the want, the grief,
The pain, the vengeful and blood-thirsty strife—
The fratricidal war, continuous

Conversation ५

From death of righteous Abel to this day.
And heard since then in every land the voice
Crying up from the ground,—myriad-voiced woe
Of the wronged brotherhood ; those smitten down
At sacrifice and at the daily toil,
Oppressed, robbed, persecuted, slain in war.

And long will be thy task to reconcile
The evils of the world with Providence ;
These strivings, wrongs, crimes, cryings, agonies,
Tortures, calamities, diseases, death.
As Gautama once said : *If God exists
And is all-powerful, he would not make
A world so miserable ; or being good,
Would not continue still its misery—
Or not controlling all he is not God.*

Ah me, to take the troublous burden up !
To tell the woe of this plague-smitten Earth !
For life's few joys, what multitude of ills !
Pain for each breath and peril for each step,
Incessant toiling, care, anxiety,—
The constant struggle to maintain ourselves,
With Death close following upon our course.

I watch the people going from the mills,
Men, women, youths ; impressed the little ones,
All yielding to the weight of their employ :
The shoulders stooped ; and twisted, bent the
limbs,—
The visage early roughened and deformed :
Girls sick with cotton cough, the children dwarfed

The Colloquy

And mentally impoverished through life.
I watch those in the mines, on public works,
At furnaces,—the stokers on our ships,
Enduring what no gain will compensate;
And men in copper works, lead, acid, glass,—
At blasting, grinding, polishing, whose trade,
Exhausting, poisoning, cuts short their years.
Others have their continual drudgery,
Labor that will not quit their hands or minds.
Poor souls! beginning day with weariness,
Too weary they, to rest when night is come.
Poor, weary, worn-out creatures! whom no night
Brings rest, nor day the dawn of liberty:—
Thus do the millions buy the right to breathe.

Behold the masses in their poverty!
Their moral darkness! blighting ignorance!
The poorer ones in sodden misery,—
Their houses filthy, leaking rookeries,
Their clothing, rotten, falling from their limbs,
Their scanty fuel never warming them,
Their stinted and insipid aliment,
Keeping alive but little nourishing:—
Men, courageless and aimless, at their work
Or gone to drink, to crime, to savagery;
Women and children to what resource brought!
Yet sometimes wondering if one can be
Poor and not wicked and of all despised.

Or once survey those sinks of pestilence,
The city's shame and curse, where people crowd

Conversation 𐄂

Like swinish multitude, the sexes mixed,—
Where all diseases breed or enter in,
Where misery brings forth as naturally
As slimy creatures crawl out of the mire ;—
Whereto all degradations find their way,
Where moral lapse and fall seek covering,
Where hard misfortune turns for company
And vice and villainy have hiding place ;—
Men, women, children, in this horrid drift,
Merging their individuality.

One dying, whispers, it may be to God,
To lover somewhere, father, mother, friend,
Clutching convulsively, as if to grasp
Some presence that is not—that should be there ;
Fair as Diana once, a specter now,
Emaciated so the comely form,
Withered the hands and sunk the full-orbed breasts,
Wasted of bloom the cheeks and hollowed deep,—
A face where all misfortunes limn themselves,
All horrors, all distresses, miseries,
And with the dying, love-forsaken one,
The drunken, brawling, coarse ones and profane ;
Bedraggled wretches, from lewd orgies come,
And night hags, resting from their revelry.
And men—but why call one I saw a man ?
Senseless he lay with drink, putredinous ;
His face so deeply pitted that it seemed
Like pumice or the comb of bumblebees,—
Hideous wretch ! dogs would not lick his sores.
Ah me, what beings these ! Hell has not worse ;—
For nowhere could more hellish realm be found,

The Colloquy

More wicked or tormented populace,
Than in the city's haunts of vice and crime,—
Abortive, monstrous, leprous, ulcerous!
As if all humors of the social mass
Were there drawn out, to sicken and defile.
Such are these slums that gather all this kind,
The refuse of the race and infamous,—
Sots, vagrants, felons, harlots, panderers,
Devoid of shame; to wallow in Sin's mire,
Their one delight—so to profane delight.
Such the lapsed masses and dehumanized,
As one has written: *Damned into the world
And not born into it.* And this we owe
Them in apology: these wretches are
What we had been, cast in their rueful lot,—
As we had been not bred to woes refined.
And yet, most sorrowful of all to tell:
Through this degraded life and criminal,
Far generations will have misery.

How sad the lot of those inheriting
A weakened constitution or the lack
Of vital force which predisposes them,
Either in mind or body to disease,
To gnawing appetite and every vice,
Making their lives a burden and a curse!
Those to misfortune doomed, to poverty,
Obscurity, and deprivation; those
To shameful bondage born, to caste, to ban,
And to inferior family and race;
Whom color, hair, nose, lips, and eyes debar
From social privilege and right,—race-marked

Conversation ㄧ

By Nature which long generations bear
And suffer for; degraded and disowned,—
Hated, despised for very helplessness,
Their weakness bringing to them enemies.

Sad lot to live under despotic rule,
Or dwell in an inhospitable clime!
How wretched life is in the Polar World!
Scarcely less wretched under Tropic Sun.
How miserable the life of savages
And not less miserable the life of those,
Inhabiting the wastes of ancient lands.
What is life worth in Africa? How much
In Asia? What boon has it conferred
Upon the naked superstitious tribes,
And cannibal, of the Dark Continent—
Spoiled, hunted, sold as slaves through all the years?
What boon on over-peopled India,
Whose hungry, houseless millions only wait
The time of famine and of pestilence,
Certain to come and sweep them all away?
What boon upon the millions taking life,
Who come into the world but to go out?

How sad their lot, who bear deformity
Of person or the loss of faculties!
Think of the million living who are blind,
To whom the rising and the setting Sun
Are hidden and all Nature's beauties veiled.
With them the numbers, inarticulate,
And deaf to all the music of the world.

The Colloquy

Yet sadder lot—the many thousands more,
Bereft most piteously of reason's light.

E'en Nature lays upon the weaker ones
The heavier burden while rewarding least.
How disproportionate the lot of sex!
See woman in unintermittent round
Of toil, of drudgery, of serving, care,
And, in her office of maternity,
Weighted so heavily in race of life!
Each child born, brings her to the gates of Death,
And men in savagery, in barbarism,
Or profligate or vicious, add the weight
Of their unthrift and heartless cruelties,
While men in Christian lands deny her, still,
Emancipation from barbaric wrong.
What brutal subjugation she has borne,
From immemorial past till now, through force
Of custom and religion and the law!
And in her awful service to her kind,
Put under blame and ceremonial ban.
In Asia, unwelcome at her birth,
Enslaved in marriage and in widowhood
Accursed; in age outcast, in death unwept.
In other lands, how slavish still her toil!
How grudgingly the recompense bestowed!
In Belgium and in the Netherlands,
Serving with men at loading cars and ships;
In Germany, yoked to the plow with cows
And harnessed with the dogs to market carts,
In Alpine Oberland myself have seen
Swiss girls, dressed in the roughest male attire,

Conversation 𐌆

Engaged as muleteers, at herding goats,
At harvesting the grass and bearing it
Down from those lonesome heights and perilous.
And seen in Italy, France, Hungary,
The women carrying their monstrous tubs
Of compost to the vineyards, up long flights
Of terraces and steep; the overseers,
Or those employing, giving their commands
With coarsest oaths; as wages, paid to them
Such pittance, it would shame to give;—the while
Delighted that the grapes were fattening
For richest vintage,—choice for festal day
Or epicure, or bacchanal's delight.
And seen the Indian women clear the land,
Plant it and till it with the woman's stick,
And seen them pitch their tents and take them up
And dress the animals for food; their lords
Preferring war, the chase and idleness.
And how unequally is woman's sin
And frailty weighed with that of man's! her love
Betrayed, deceived, not counting in excuse.
And that which shames the good if they but speak—
Her life made sacrifice to lust of man.
What story here, if one should tell in full
Woman's subjection, sorrow, martyrdom!
Not only of those who have made complaint,—
Not Hagar whom the patriarch cast forth
Into the wilderness of Beersheba;
Not Trojan women, in inhuman haste
From their slain husbands, fathers, brothers, borne
To endless slavery and exile; not
Hypsipile whom Jason left forlorn;

The Colloquy

Not Ariadne's nor Medea's wrongs,
Themselves invited or themselves avenged;
Not Dido's grief when Æneas put off
From port of Carthage; not the slighted love
Of Sappho; not neglect of that fair witch,
Flora, whom Pompey had for mistress; not
Brunhilde, cursing Siegfried's treachery;
Not loneliness of Wordsworth's Margaret,
Nor agony of her beguiled by Faust,
But wrongs of those that we ourselves have seen,
And woes and piteous abandonment.

II

How greatly wrong and villainy prevail
In all the course of human history!
So little men respect each other's rights,
Their feelings, their opinions and desires.
Not with forbearance, charity, or love,
But with unfairness and severity
Extreme, they treat their kind. How like the
beasts!
Each butting, tusking, scrambling to be first,
Trampling the weaker and destroying them.
Sharp wit compasses quite simplicity,—
The selfish and rapacious, like the wolves,
Hunt the defenseless and unfortunate
To dispossess and eat their substance up.
See speculators and monopolists,
Through fraud and robbery, have palaces
And equipage of kings, while honest toil

Conversation 𐄂

Has scarcely wherewith to be fed and clothed.
See demagogues have place and patronage,
And statesmen and economists, neglect!
See scoundrels crowned as kings while patriots,
With heavy hearts, go into banishment!
See fawning mediocrity at court
With title, ribbon, fringe, and coat of arms,
Men of preëminent ability,
Neglected, persecuted, and prescribed!
See charlatans applauded, honest men
And wise, denied the liberty to teach!
See men, like pillars, standing all alone,
For standing firmly in the time of wrong!
See rival despots and proud potentates,
At strife for the dominion of the world,
In massacre and ruin triumphing,
And holy men and just—those loving peace,
Hidden in cloisters, caves, and desert wilds!
See Dante, wandering a mendicant,—
Eating the bitter bread of beggary,
At Florence, privileged the venal horde,
Thievish, contentious, bestial, bacchanal,
To gorge and revel in her palaces!
Saintly Savonarola hanged and burned,
The worldly Borgia in St. Peter's chair!
See Bobadilla, taking his command,
Columbus, the discoverer, in chains!
Nero invested with imperial power
And Epictetus sold in slavery!
Cæsar in triumph, Cato overthrown!
Small wits at Athens supplicating gods,
And Sokrates, the wise, condemned to death!

The Colloquy

And see incestuous Herodias
And wanton Silome gain their request,
The righteous seer, for telling them their sins,
Murdered remorselessly! Tiberius,
See on the throne, and Jesus on the cross!

And Liberty—it is a toilsome tale,
Often defeat, submission, overthrow;
Cell, dungeon, bullet, gibbet, banishment!
And right—how deaf the powers to its claims!
See how the masses still are manacled
And crushed by their long years of slavery,
Ancestral disabilities and wrongs!
In Ireland, see evicted tenantry!
In India, in Egypt, see the poor
Robbed of their toil by wealth and government!
Like cattle, see Bulgarian peasants chained
And driven to cultivate the Sultan's farms!
Or see, in Persia, the tax gatherers
Extort their annual tribute with the lash!
See Russian men and women on their way,
In constant throngs to exile journeying!
See peonage and caste in Mexico,
And Kaffir serfdom in South Africa;
In free America, race prejudice,
In Europe, class division, social rank,
Denying liberty and right to most!
See Madagascar, Cuba, Crete, those isles
So fair, so rich, by robber nations ruled!
Hawaii, once the missionary's pride,—
Hawaii, see, the missionary's shame!
See reigning o'er the greater part of Earth,

Conversation 𐄂

Titled feudalities and monarchies,
Holding their rule against their subjects' will,
Imposed by might of arms, by arms sustained!
And see the greedy, jealous dynasties
And cunning diplomats at their intrigues,
The stronger, planning conquest of the weak!
Even in democratic governments,
How hardly, often, Liberty has fared!
Neglected by the ones it benefits,
Or seeming friends have treacherously sold.
How shamelessly the men of ancient Greece
Took bribes and turned them traitors, enemies
To Liberty and to their country's good!
In Rome, what envyings and jealousies
Among Republicans! and how corrupt
The suffrages! In the Italian states,
Spain, Poland, Hungary, the Netherlands,
And Germany, what lack of unity,
Coherency among the Liberals!
In France what revolutions, anarchy!
For the French populace is like a snake
That in hard conflict turns and bites itself.
In the American republics, now
Experimenting with self-government,
See the conservators of Liberty,
The middle classes, neither rich nor poor,
Encroached upon by aristocracies
Of wealth and corporate monopoly,
On the one hand, while on the other one,
Menaced by poverty and ignorance,—
The purchasable masses, destitute
Of honor, principle, and patriotism.

The Colloquy

As thou, thyself, when asking us didst show,
Savage ferocity and ignorance,
Hold wide domain,—a people seldom ruled
By the consensus of the competent.
What lawless, bestial libertines! what brutes!
What fiends on Earth, the Spartan kings, who reigned
After Lykurgos' time! detested line!
Who put to death their subjects, without trial,
Subverted laws and customs of the land,
And violated women, claiming though
Their crowns and thrones as given by right divine.
And Asian monarchs, from remotest times,
What despots all and beastly sensualists!
So many murder pens, their capitals!
Their palaces, so many brothelries!
All, on their subjects, grievous burdens laid,
As slaves, drove them with whips to fight in war,
And under lash to build their monuments,
Walled cities, temples, gorgeous palaces:
By least suspicion, provocation moved,
To put the worthiest to death, and each
Accession to the throne occasion made
For foulest treachery and murdering.
Few kings have won a place in memory
For wise, humane, and equitable rule,
But tyrants, vengeful, greedy, profligate,
Fill the long scroll with their inhuman deeds.

With wealth and place, how selfish, arrogant,
Is man! What despot, and how hard of heart!
What his imperiousness upon the throne,
His haughtiness, commanding on the field!

Conversation 𐌶

How proud in time of victory—when in
Triumphal entry or procession seen,
As Roman consuls once and generals
Returning to the world's metropolis!
What horrible magnificence adorned
The Persian kings! the Babylonian!
Who cared alone for sensual delight;—
Spending their days in soft luxurious ease,
Or plundering or taking fierce revenge,
Or glorying in their despotic sway.
What the display, the pomp, extravagance,
Of Roman Cæsars when they ruled the Earth!
Or the Byzantine emperors, on thrones
Of gold and ivory, on white bears' skins
Reclined and lavished with all luxuries
Of beggared subjects and of prostrate states!
E'en in their tombs, Mycenæ's kings and queens
In an incomparable splendor laid;
Wearing in death their sumptuous robes of state,
Covered in ornament with plates of gold;
Their golden diadems, rings, bracelets, belts,
Baldricks, and brooches radiant with gems,
Placed on them, as in life, and by their sides,
Their inlaid weapons, curiously adorned,
Lodged with them, in their costly sepulchers.
In what barbaric splendor, were arrayed
Rameses, Xerxes, Cræsus, Solomon,
Nebuchadnezzar, Asurbanipal,
Imperial Kubla Khan in Kambalu,
The Aztec war-chiefs and Peruvian,—
Their precious persons, covered up with gems
And weighted with their ornaments of gold.

The Colloquy

As gorgeously the Mogul dynasties,
India's rajahs, sultans, emperors;—
He on the peacock throne and wearing crown
Shining with Kohinoor and he who built
Taj Mahal for his wife, a sepulcher.
So Spanish grandees of the earlier time
Bedecked themselves with every finery:
Their gorgeous villas, nestling on the banks
Of fairest rivers and o'erhanging them,
And shrouded in the vine and olive trees;
And hung the spacious chambers and the halls
With Syrian and Persian tapestries,
The floors laid well with purple rugs, where guests
Reclined; and serving them, their hosts of slaves,
With dancing girls and minstrels to delight;
While starving peasants, in their filthy rags,
Swarming with vermin, begged about the gates.
And what the lavish grandeur, opulence,
Now shown by the Old World's nobility,
Rich for entail of vast estates in land
And palaces and products of the arts!
As grand the New World's aristocracies,
Rich for the robbery of others' toil,
And rivaling the Orient in display.

What wrongs the multitude of men endure,
That one may have his pleasure, wealth, and
power!
Wrong and oppression, all, that governments
May be invested with authority!
And what surrendering of primal rights
To institutions of society!

Conversation Ⅹ

And what man's wrongs, the sufferings endured,
Through wasteful and exterminating war!
The indescribable atrocities
Of armies taking their revenge, as seen
At siege of Azoth, Ilium, Carthage, Tyre;
Saguntum, Nineveh, Jerusalem,
At Babylon, Seleucia, Syracuse,
Delhi, Otrar, Samarkand, Nishabur,
And Rome, when Gauls, Goths, Vandals plundered
it.

O, who may tell the human butchery
Within those cities' walls? Most horrible!
Most lamentable and unspeakably
Dreadful! Yet is the chance of war the one
Enduring theme of bards, in interest
The first to all mankind since Time began:
And held as spectacles the most sublime,
The pitiless assault and wasting flames.

See what wide desolations mark the paths
Of conquerors, who, for the ruin made,
Imperishable names and glory gained!
Of these what else than havoc which they wrought,
Has one thought to relate? This is the tale
Told of Sennacherib, when ravaging
Fair Elam's plains and Babylonia;
This, of Kambyzes laying Egypt waste;
This, of the Persians when invading Greece;
This, of the armies led by Gengis Khan.
This, of the Portuguese adventurers,
Scouring the coasts of Africa for slaves,
Gold, ivory, and oil—or they sailed East

The Colloquy

Where Ind and the Malaysian spiceries
Offered them gain. This, of the Spaniards, crazed,
Infuriated, in their search for gold;
Wasting the goodly Indies and the rich
And populous Peru and Mexico,—
So many millions bringing to distress,
To lamentation, shame, and bitter death:
As none before afflicted, robbed, reviled,
Branded, dismembered, roasted, mangled, stabbed,
Whipped, racked, and famished, dashed against
the rocks;
In sport beheaded, scalded with hot oil,
Ripped them alive and hunted them with dogs,
With tortures, maimings more unnamable,
Thus fertile infinite their cruelties;—
Christians, in name, in hellish deeds, archfiends,
Licentious, villainous beyond compare.
And this of our Teutonic ancestors,
Or Saxons, Angles, Frisians, Jutes, or Danes,
Barbaric tribesmen, who had their delight
In drink, carouse, rapine, theft, piracy,
And never ceasing war upon their kind;—
Who, where they went, spared naught; robbed,
burned, and killed,
And left behind irreparable waste;
Their two-mast barks, such terror on the seas,
That feeble folk put in their litany,
Deliver us from fury of the Jutes;
This, of the barbarous Israelites, who warred
With Eglon, Sisera, Abimilech,—
Hewed Ammon hip and thigh from Aroer,
By Arnon into Minneth; those that smote

Conversation Ⅹ

The Amalekites, from Havelah to Shur;
And this, of that fierce prophet who cut down
Agag, their king,—that would not spare of them
Woman or child, nor one of flock or herd.

Even Religion, lauded as the gift
Of Heaven, has brought its many ills to men,—
Hatred, revenge, intolerance, war, death.
See older sects at persecuting new
And Orthodox at burning Heretics!
Ah me, what awful tortures men applied,
And maimed and killed in name of the dear Lord!
For worshiping and for opinion's sake,
What woes unutterable men have endured!
Woe! woe! to the inhabitants of Earth,
The angel cries in the apocalypse,
Prophetic of the tribulations brought
By persecutions and the holy wars.
And of all despotisms the world has known
Religious orders have maintained the worst.
What tyrant, conqueror, or autocrat,
E'er held o'er man oppressive sovereignty,
Like Brahman and the Roman hierarchs?
And where has villainy such cunning shown,
As in pontifical authority?
What ready pretexts former priesthoods found,
To take the lives and property of men!
And in the Middle Ages, when the Church
Held in the world complete supremacy,
So many consecrated pirates were
Its priests, its bishops, cardinals, and popes.
And priesthoods, doctrines, worship—sects by what

The Colloquy

Devices, costly, fraudulent maintained!
And what the methods by which councils wrought
Their creeds infallible?—at Chalcedon?
Constantinople? Nice and Ephesus?
Not piety prevailing nor the truth,
Not love of man, not lowly Christ's commands,
But selfish interests and partisan
Of rival prelates, scheming emperors.
And what the woes, the pains men have endured
Through superstitious fear! what martyrdoms
From penances Ecclesiastics imposed!
How bloody, filthy, and obscene the cults
Through which our modern faiths had their descent!—

Common to Heathendom in olden time,
To Canaanite and Israelite alike.
What horrid worship seen in Africa!
Once seen as horrible in Mexico,
When Aztec priests tore out the human heart,
Yet palpitating, gave it to the gods.
And what self-abnegation, torturing,
Starving, deforming, mutilating seen
In the monastic rules,—asceticisms,
Brahman or Buddhist, Christian, Taoist,
Mohammedan or Russian celibate!

In name of Justice, too, how terrible
The cruelties inflicted upon men!—
Lash, knout, thong, brand, knife, stock, chain,
pillory,
The dungeon, gallows, stake, rack, crucifix,—
The torture still applied in many lands,

Conversation Ⅸ

Some of them counted Christian, civilized,—
That of all crimes, the darkest, wrongfulest,
Are penalties that Justice has imposed.

III

Humanity, how careless of thine own!
And how indifferent to suffering!
Thine are the poor of every land and time,
Helot, plebeian, peasant, serf, and churl,
Who toil and struggle—never to possess—
The multitudinously burdened ones,
Who sink beneath the miseries of life.
Thine are the grimy workers in the mines,
Thine, the pale sickly children of the mills,
And thine, the robbed, the wronged, the unavenged,
Enslaved, imprisoned,—weak, pressed to the wall.
Thine, the poor exiles broken with despair,
And thine, the orphan and apprenticed child
And homeless waif, whom no one loves or helps.
Thine, the deserted wife, and maid, and her,
Not less thine own, whom thou wouldst cast away.
Thine, the innumerable multitudes,
Who lived and perished in the ages past,
Sensual, superstitious, from the brutes
Little removed, forgotten, nameless all.
Thine, too, the thousands who were lately slain
In English massacres, in the Soudan,
In Kabul and in Kandahar, or since
Shot down in Matabeleland, where men,
Poor savages, we call them, did defend,
With their rude weapons, to the last, their homes;

The Colloquy

So offering their bodies to the arms
Of European science—patriots,
Deserving better, as the thousands more
Falling before their conquerors. And thine,
The Sandwich Islanders, South Africans,
The Indians, Maoris, Australians,
Now perishing before the Christian world.
Thine, Egypt's fellahin,—those conscripts thine,
Whom the old Asiatic despotisms
Force into battle, and whom Christian Europe
Leads forth like dumb beasts to the slaughter-field.

The fittest live, our latest science claims,
But often the unfittest ones survive,—
The ignoble, the thriftless, listless mass,
And those vile herds, venal, unprincipled,
That serve in the support of despotism.
Of these, who were the fittest to survive,
The martyred ones, or the inquisitors ?
Of those engaged in war, the men who fell,
Or they that lived continuing the race ?
Of men of Greece, who were the worthiest
To live, Pausanias and Hippias,
Or slain at Marathon ? Thermopylæ ?
Plataea ? Salamis ? Eurymedon ?
The bravest men of all have died in war,
The noblest in heroic sacrifice.
And in the centuries of human strife,
How oft the worst have lived ! As one has told
Us of the Middle Ages when the Church
Of Rome, all-dominant, to cloisters sent
The gentlest ones, most studious, beautiful,—

Conversation Ƨ

To martyrdom, the thoughtful, liberal,
While coarse and rude and base of intellect
Married and multiplied their meaner kind.

As thou, thyself, hast clearly shown to us,
Seldom do the best qualities of men
Pass down in an uninterrupted line.
But long the genealogies of crime,
Of vagrancy, of vice, of villainy.
Even where men have striven to preserve
Distinctive quality or nobleness,
What sore discomfiture has come to them
Sooner or later in the line of heirs !
Few dynasties have added to the fame
Of those who founded them ; through long descent
Losing the splendor of their nobler names :
So Kadmos', Pelop's and Achæmenes',
Antiochus', the line of Ptolemy,
Of Constantine and house of Medici.
And few the families that keep intact
A goodly lineage. What earl or lord
That honors now his titled ancestry ?
And what illustrious man has had an heir
Worthy his name ? Not Moses, Perikles ;
Not Cæsar, Alexander, Hannibal,
Aurelius, Charlemagne, Napoleon ;
Not Cromwell, Washington, nor Bolivar,—
For childless, some of these, or having sons,
Bequeathing them inferior qualities.
As Landor put in Argive Helen's mouth
The wisdom of the ancients:—*Seldom bears
A beauteous mother beauteous progeny,*

The Colloquy

*Nor fathers often see such semblances
As Paris in the face of Corythos.*
And genius, in what land is its descent ?

Nor does the wrong, the pain, and misery
Lie upon man alone. Could bees and ants
Relate the inner life of hive and hill,
A revelation would be given us
Of discord, war, misrule, and treachery,
As sad as ever man has chronicled.
And could the field and wood relate to us
The story of their life, or spring, or brook,
Or the denuded hills, what long account
And woeful, of exterminating strife!
And could the wingéd nations of the air,
The animals that roam the wilderness,
The fishes of the sea, tell of themselves,
What story! piteous, calamitous,—
The long lament of wrong and misery
During the evolutionary course
That made them what they are and us with them.
Each drop of water that evaporates,
Ends countless lives. If we could know the griefs—
The unrequited hopes, ambitions, loves,
At wrecking of those tiny crystal worlds,
What romance, tragedy of our own race
Would equal these in mournful, pitiful ?

True, the Apologist and Optimist
Find good in evil or a recompense.
But these should see the dominance of Sin,
The scornful mastery of Chance and Fate

Conversation ୫

And the uninterrupted reign of Wrong.
Or they should see how Might and Cunning spoil
The weak, unfortunate, and ignorant ;—
Should look on the possessions of the rich,
Their palaces, their equipage, attire,
Then on the rags and hovels of the poor ;
Or see how insolently Property
Looks down on its creators at their toil.
Should once pass through a prison in the East,
Through Europe's castle-dungeons underground,
Through torture-chamber of Inquisitors,
Or through a Roman amphitheater
Where murdering of men and animals
Was made a pleasure for the multitudes.
And they should see the dreadful instruments
So fiendishly devised for torturing :—
The agonies intolerable feel
Of one in spasms of hydrophobia ;
Once look in Ungolino's hunger-cell,
Once in Calcutta's horrible Black Hole.
They should have seen the surgeon's art before
The use of anesthetics, or have seen
The physiologist experiment
Dissecting living animals. Or had
They seen the Greeks and Hebrews worshiping,
And older Heathendoms throughout the world,
When priests were killing for the sacrifice.
And they should read about the French Bastile,
How Tyranny and Treachery had filled
Its loathsome cells, nor Justice visited ;
Of London Tower where the noblest blood,
For centuries, was spilt. They should have crossed,

The Colloquy

With the condemned, o'er Venice' Bridge of Sighs.
Or they should see the market-place for slaves,
In Moorish Tangier or in the Soudan;
Once only, look down in a slave-ship's hold,
Bearing her human freight across the main;
In Equatorial Africa survey
An Arab caravan, its merchandise,
A human herd whose blood, whose bleaching bones,
Mark the sad trail through many a long degree.
And they should see an exile prison-house
In Semipalatinsk, Ulbinkst, Irkutsk,
In Krasnoyarsk, Tomsk, Ust Kamenogorsk,
Or fare with convicts on their weary march,
With suspects, in the far Trans-Baikal mines,
In Yakut oolooses, distributed
Under the Asiatic pole of cold.
And they should see the pathway of the storm,
The flood's destructive course or lava stream,
The stifling shower of ash and earthquake's waste;
Or look upon a famine-stricken land,
A city desolated by the plague,
Or walk a wreck-strewn shore, a Javan plain,
Paved over with its whitening skeletons;
And they should walk about a battle-field
Strewn with the dead, the wounded left to die.
And they should know the sorrow of the world,—
The awful disproportion that exists
Between the want and struggle of all life
And momentary joys and comforts found;
Should know the worthlessness of every aim
In life—life's emptiness and its despair.

Conversation ‡

War, slavery, storm, famine, pestilence,
Afford the answer to the Optimist,
As does the moth, singed by the candle's flame,
The worm, the insect trodden under foot,
The firstling killed, the bird robbed of its mate,—
Each broken troth and every cruelty,
Each death preventable, each martyrdom,
Each unjust sentence and imprisonment,
And every wrong there is and evil done——”

Here interrupting his complaint I said,
“ Thy knowledge of the overburdened world,
How full! But care thou dost not overlook
Abundance of the good and beautiful,
Nor what from first apparently designed
All things to serve some necessary end.”

Resuming the complaint again, he said,
“ Thyself hast shown us that the evil keeps
Its even pace with good, nor yet hast found
Revealed on Earth omniscient providence.
Capricious Nature sends us good or ill,
Or help or harm, thoughtless of consequence.
Design that makes the lily grow and rose
And gives the nightingale its power of song,
Sows wide the troublous weeds; makes tumors grow
And sports its terrible monstrosities;
Brings forth its creatures fierce and venomous,—
Shark, serpent, scorpion, and centipede,
With legions of annoying parasites;
As well as fertile land and cheerful scene,—
The useful, pleasurable, and beautiful,

The Colloquy

Creates the desert and the wilderness,
The desolations of the Polar world
And airless, uninhabitable Moon ;
Sends the swift hurricane and thunderbolt
And rends the Earth and lays its dwellings waste.
And what disparity, as thou hast seen,
Comparing the enormous waste of means
With scantiness of the results obtained !
Countless the germs which Nature blights and
wastes ;—

Rears from a million seeds, a single tree,
From spawn of million eggs, one full-grown fish :—
To accidents exposing all that lives,
To foes, to unsubduable disease ;
Constructs this world of contests, rivalries,—
Where no one makes advance or ever gains,
But wounds or disappoints another one,
Where none possesses aught desirable,
But others envy or detract from it,—
Where every one born to the strife goes forth
To kill another or himself is killed.

Where one succeeds in life, a thousand go
Despairing, broken-hearted, to the grave.
Like the Crusaders going forth to win
The Holy Land and glory and renown,—
Strong men and venturesome and loving war,
Impelled by mightiest enthusiasm,
But fell out on the way, in sad retreat,
Or perished in the strife or miserably
In prisons, desert wastes, came to their end.
Or Munger's piteous plaint the most take up,

Conversation 𐌆

That in this world our bread is hard to earn
And love impossible for us to keep.

And we—how seldom with ourselves at peace!
The foes within are more than foes without,
For, not in outward wretchedness alone
Of this unnumbered confraternity
Of helpless sufferers, is seen the curse
Of life. It is in greater misery
Within—of saddened and despairing ones,
And guilty ones, involved in sin and crime.
Each memory a painful secret holds,
Each one experience had, which told in full,
Would add another Iliad of woes.
Life, like a knotted skein of silk, unwinds
With stubborn tangles to the very end.
How truly has the Bible said of man,
His days are sorrows and his travail grief.

The Muse relates the sorrows of the world
In grief of these,—of her in Ramah heard,
Weeping, refusing to be comforted,
And Hecuba, heard in her loud lament,
And wild Ænone's wail in Ida's wood;
Demeter, seeking lost Persephone,
And Niobe in tears, and Psalmist king,
Bewailing Absalom, his wilful son,
And Mary at the cross where Jesus died.

The Thrakians mourned when one was born to them,
And when one died had feast and merry day,
So grieved they for the soul imprisoned here,

The Colloquy

So glad were they when it had found release.
And Mexicans, when they baptized a child,
Prayed that the gods might guide it safely through
The world of pain, affliction, penitence;
While men of faith, who hoping for the best,
Have comfort only in the thought that Earth,
With all its evils, soon must come to end.

For what wise man, to contemplation given,
That has not had occasion to lament
Deeply the wretched nature of the world ?
Sage Heraklitus wept continually
Over the sins and miseries of men ;
And men, in every age, to sorrow brought,
To pain, or weary of the strife, or led
To fear their mental powers were in decay,
Have ended their own lives ; thus Samson, Saul,
And Cato, Zeno, Otho, Cassius,
And Marcellinus and Empedokles,
Longinius, Atticus, Lucretius,
Silius Italicus, Diodorus,
Petronius and Geronteus' wife ;
Brutus, Cleombrotus, Demosthenes,
And he, who sung the hymn to Jupiter,—
An Optimist, a Universalist,
Yet wearied of his life and ended it.
Thomas à Kempis thought it misery
Enough for one to live upon the Earth,
As Orphic hymns had taught and Sibyls once.
And so Erasmus,—burdened with his life,
His only wish was to be done with it.
The Buddhist seeks Nirvana ; troublous life

Conversation Ⅹ

Denies and death a joyous welcome gives.
Of martyrs, most expressed their gratitude
To those around for their deliverance,
Thanking and paying executioners
For doing them so great a benefit.

Our worship is the sorrowful, the woes
Of man personified and deified.
The Church was founded on the suffering
Of Jesus—as on him man's great guilt lay,
Or he endured the agony and cross:
In monumental ceremony these
She keeps in memory; with these, the pain
And tribulation since the world began.

IV

How helpless man! the sport of Destiny!
His coming, like a shipwrecked mariner,
Defenseless, naked, cast up by the surf
On unknown and inhospitable coast.
In infancy how weak! how pitiable!
May only cry or feebly creep his way,
This little outcast in the infinite.
In youth he is cast off as is the herb
Before the scythe; in manhood's strength cut down;
Or passing the meridian of life,
How soon old age comes on and heavily
Time lays his burdens! sluggish grows each sense,
As one by one, life's energies ooze out.
Desire and hope fail him, and he has left
Only this bundle of decrepitude:

The Colloquy

The bended form, racked by disease and toil,—
Bronzed visage, corrugated, shriveled up;
Eyes dim of sight, the ears as dumb to speech;
Palsied the touch, and dulled the sense of taste,
Of smell; and loosened or low-worn the teeth,
Nor any vital organ in repair,—
The mind a second time in childishness.

Who is not sick or ill-disposed? On whom
Does not some languor fall? some weariness?
And is not this the humor of us all—
Contentious, discontented, petulant,
Blue, melancholy, miserable, and mad?
Impatient, some of heat and some of cold,
Of labor some, and some of idleness;
The poor distressed and suffering through want,
The rich made sick by ease and luxury.

Ah me, what tenants these! unwelcome all,
Find lodgement in this little clod of earth,—
Fever that boils the brain and shaking chills;
Tormenting stone, consumption, rheum, and gout
Scurvy, anæmia, deadly cholera;
The hideous cancer, pox, paralysis,
Immedicable leprosy, and plague,
With piteous delusions of the mind,
All the wild forces of fanaticism,—
Dark superstitions, terrors; morbid gloom,
Insomnia and hypocondria
And melancholia and delirium:
With these our foibles, idiosyncrasies,
Innumerable wants, thirsts, hungerings;

Conversation ㄨ

Our beastly and abominable lusts,
And that unrest which only Death can still.

Nor does wealth, power, genius, fame, confer
What all men seek—but never find on Earth.
For even richest ones lack something still
And greatest fail of what they would attain ;
As when the wife of England's conqueror,
Coming to her distressful journey's end,
Told how all Earthly glory she had seen
But never with it aught of happiness.
Hear thou the poet making his complaint :
Our life is war ; eternal war with woe.

In every house there is this tragedy,
For every eye on Earth this woeful scene,—
The dismal panorama Time unfolds.
None need go to the theater to see
The worst that has befallen man, nor yet
To romance or account in history
Of crime, war, servitude, calamity :
It is what each experiences, it is
That which inexorably comes between
Ourselves and what we fix our hopes upon—
It is what finds and pierces every heart.

Omniscience could not willingly create
This universe of wrong. And what is man,
Conscious of all, himself the sufferer,
That he still plagues the Earth and will not cease
In his desire to propagate the race ?
But Love, entreating with soft glance of eyes

The Colloquy

Sweet smiles and quickly palpitating hearts,
Makes men and women traitors to their kind
Who further still this heritage of woe.

V

To whom shall we appeal ? What power without
Is there to hear us ? Nature but repeats
Unceasingly this strife-ful spectacle.
True, we are sometimes told this is the way
Up to the higher form and excellence
Of moral type. But Nature now how old !
Already infinite the time of growth—
Time seemingly, if wanting time, wherein
To perfect everything, and she brings forth
This warring, self-devouring progeny,—
This fearfully depraved and sinful life
And never ceasing pain for all that lives.

As many as would save the world have failed :—
Their sympathy, their will, their heroism
Soothe not the pain nor heal the deep disease
Nor rescue those who wait deliverance.
Prometheus proudly suffering for men,
The strong-armed Herakles combating wrong,
Meek Gautama resolved to end desire,
Wise Sokrates at winnowing the truth ;
Confucius, Manu, Moses giving law,
The mournful Jeremiah in complaint
And Jesus with his ministry of love,
Epitomize the efforts of the race—
Engaging with the ancient evil powers ;

Conversation ୫

Nor seen yet the advance to victory,
But helplessness of man and his despair,
Beset with his innumerable ills.

Pity they gave and endless sacrifice
Without avail. Not less our praise is due
To them: so worthy were the gifts our thanks
And grateful memories may not repay.
This was the precious merit Jesus won:—
Despised and hated and reviled of men,
Yet loving them and deeply pitying.
And this the glory of his martyrdom:—
Abandoned by the God to whom he prayed,
Not bearing his own suffering alone;
His heart broke with the woes of other ones,
Millions on millions in their misery.

Prophets, reformers, heroes, saviors come
And go their way, and mighty conquerors,
But still the Earth endures its sin and pain
And waits one mightier than Herakles,
To cleanse and cure and to avenge its wrong.

Thyself hast shown the limits of reform,
The impotence of all philanthropies
And institutional morality.
No more than our æsthetics will produce
Musicians, painters, poets, orators,
Will moral science or a scheme of faith
Produce the honest man and holy saint.
And never will our economics bring
Plenty to all and ease and happiness.

The Colloquy

Nor will our sociology combine
In peaceful, universal fellowship
These egoistic personalities.

The best of moral precepts now are found
In lands where men are dead to moral sense,
To enterprise, to justice, liberty;
While Ages of the Faith, especially
Marked by their purism or their fervor, show
No corresponding ethical advance.
The kneeling nations, loyal to the Church,—
Distinguished for their reverence, are as much
In ill repute for deeds of lawlessness,
For vice and ignorance and bigotry;
As vilest loudest to the gods have called,
Not thinking morally to mend their lives.
No expiation made and no reform,
But leaves its residue of unreclaimed;
The stubborn masses choosing still to keep
The brutish habit,—robbing, warring still
And following their selfish ends or lusts.

The progress which we boast, but slowly moves,
But slowly civilizes and refines,
While increase in productive power and wealth
Shows not a tendency to liberate
The masses from their toil and poverty :—
Reform, Advancement, and Enlightenment
Confronting everywhere, in every age,
Earth's irremediable ills and wrongs.

Nor righteousness nor piety avails,
Exempting from the miseries of life.

Conversation Ⅹ

The innocent and those who plead for good,
To what antagonisms and hate exposed!
Seizure of person and of property,
While sharing with the wicked equally,
The common sorrow of our kind and pain.
And piety has added yet the pains
Of deep contrition and unworthiness,—
Trials of the probationary state
And the denial of the will to live.
Not sinners, but the noblest of the Earth,
Are the most wretched, and in gloom the most.
What weariness of spirit, what despair,
What insipidity, disgust, revolt,
And the temptation to despondency,
The saint at worshipping, experiences!
What parched and desert way, and dark and drear,
Through which his journey lies! What weight he
bears!
As Bunyan, the meek pilgrim, writes: *I was
A burden and a terror to myself.*

VI

Long my discourse, but thine inquiries still
Remain: *Whence came we? whereto do we go?
Why does this world of wrong and pain exist?*
All was by the unconscious powers wrought
Without reflection or concept of end,
And the finality, as seen displayed
In worlds, in living organisms, events,
Exists not by, but for intelligence;
Evolving life in all its varied forms,

The Colloquy

Instinct and reason, as unconsciously
As corals build or mollusks form their shells.

We are not other than the elements:—
There is in matter a continuous
Ascending transformation, of which life
Is the result, the intellect of man,
The highest it attains; with tendency,
Inherent, constantly to retrograde
And to return unto itself: thence death.”

I asked, “ But whence the thought of Deity—
The sense of God which men declare so real
To them ? And whence the popular belief
In gods, in dæmons, angels, manes, ghosts ?
May there not be an extramundane mind,
And good and evil spirits who respond
To man’s deep faith,—to which all ages, lands,
Or superstitious or enlightened, give
In proof, so great a cloud of witnesses ? ”

He answered, “ Dreams and figments of the brain !
This is the genesis of all the gods—
The forces, elements, phenomena,
Personified, and apotheosis
Of warriors, chiefs, and early ancestors,
With apotheosis in later times
Of majesty and iron despotism
And passions of mankind etherealized,
Or given permanent, dæmonic forms;—
The awful mysteries of Nature some,
Great heroes some, kings worthy of the name,

Conversation ३

With sires illustrious and amiable ;
Adventurers the most and revelers,
Shameless in villainy and mad excess,—
Aping the tyrant, epicure, knave, clown.
The characters attributed to them,
Intriguing, jealous, vengeful, sensual,
Alone acquaint us with their origin.
And only dreams and fancies of the brain,
Those unsubstantial, ghostly visitants,
Phantoms residing in the ancient mind,—
Pale, timid, twilight-wanderers, that come
From an abode as shadowy and dim.”

I asked, “ But what of the persistency
Of hope,—the longing to live after death? ”

He answered me: “ A pleasing sentiment.
But who, of all, would willingly repeat
His life on Earth ? Should one knock at the graves
And ask the dead in them, whether they wished
To come upon the world again and live,
They all would shake their heads. And all would
soon
Weary no less of immortality.”

I said, “ But most have thought there is a land,
Somewhere beyond the veiled gates of Death,
Where men have only immortality
And weary not in ceaseless round of joy.
And somewhere, seemingly, must be a realm
Where, under equal rule and equal skies,
Men may have compensations for the wrongs

The Colloquy

Imposed,—the bitter servitude endured,
The prison, exile, heel of despotism,
Or who in war came to untimely end,
Or who have suffered here for righteousness.”

Impatient of my view, he thus replied,
“ So men expect in time to find a pure
Democracy—commune of equal rights,
Yet all the while hold their despotic rule;
Warring, enslaving, robbing, murdering,
The many evils of the woeful world
Thus multiplying,—thus continuing
Chaos’ old reign and pandemonium.

And where the other world to compensate
The loss, the wrong, the suffering of Earth ?
The prism reveals to us the elements
Of farthest worlds; the metals in the Sun,
In the Pole Star, Sirius, Alcyone :
All are such stuff as Earth—a curse on it !
In every world these changeful elements,
Quaternion of seasons, solar year,
And alternating of the day and night ;
All habitable worlds preoccupied,
Where one who visits is a trespasser
Or begs a grudging hospitality.
Not one of all, but bears its teeming life
And overcrowded populace, as does
The Earth, where war, storm, famine, pestilence,
And numerous diseases decimate
Its multitudes; and death, coming to all,
Permits new generations to arise,—

Conversation ५

These generations, the sole occupants
In their own time and place, and having lived,
Transmit to others, as themselves obtained.

Thyself hast seen how weak, unreasonable,
Are all our doctrines of a future life;
One only, touching probability—
That of the transmigration of the soul,
Or its returning sometime to the source
Whence it has had its life, thus merging in
Being unceasingly continuous.”

Then I to him: “ But little this consoles,
Death ending personal identity.
Or maybe Nature favoring some Boodh,
Grant him return of consciousness; or like
Tiresias, the blind old seer, to whom,
Alone of all the shades, Persephone
Granted intelligence and memory.”

He answered, “ Never other faith has found
Such wide acceptance on the Earth as this:
The creed of Kapila, Patanjali,
Of Kalidasa, Krishna, Gautama;
Of Zoroaster, wisest of the seers,
Of Trismegistus who all learning had;
Of Dioscorides, Euripides,
Pythagoras, Plotinus, Porphyry;
The mystics Dionysius and Bohme,
And these read deepest in philosophy,
Plato, Spinoza, Bruno, Goethe, Kant,—

The Colloquy

Instructing us, would we but heed the way,
Escaping thus life's ills.

But still we strive,
For what, we do not know; the wrong and pain
Prolonging, helping further to prolong,
Unwilling yet our bondage here to end,
And wail and woe of all the living world.

Not that I sorrow always without joy,
For there is pleasure in unselfish work,—
Trusting to later generations gifts
Not yet appreciated in the world.
In music and in art I find delight;—
The harmony, expression, purity
That quite engages me and I forget
The travail of the Earth, its dissonance,
Its weariness, its wickedness, its woe,
Its wrongs, its strifes, its chilling tragedies—
Life's loath, detestable experiences."

Resting his argument, a while he sat,
As one in meditation deep. Then said,
"Once to live on the Earth and happily,
Or miserably, as is the lot of most,
Should satisfy, though few resignedly,
So take the measure even of their ills.
Myself have sometimes wished that there might be
A land beyond those darksome boundaries,
For which to look,—like greatest traveler,
Who having seen the most, yet more would see;

Conversation §

As when the youthful Macedonian
Had won the Earth, then wept that there were not
Yet other worlds to conquer and explore—
And sometimes wished the fables had been true,
Conferring Earthly immortality;
As once of hollow Lakadæmon told,—
How Helen there with Menelaos lived,
In youth perennial and changeless love;
The past forgiven or forgotten all,
Nor the Greek chiefs nor Trojan wiles disturbed.

At times, in contemplation deep I touch
Nearly that happy state where self is lost:
The will, no longer individual,
Become idea,—the eternal hence,
Subject of knowledge, pure; disturbed no more
By vain desire or strife of elements;
Seeing what sensuous eyes have never seen,—
The permanent, essential forms, that lie
Behind illusory phenomena.

At times, imagination lifts me up,
As it does thee, and I have visions then
Of worlds not blighted with our Earthly ills,—
Worlds, sinless, deathless, peopled by a race
Who live, as we have thought in our ideals
Ourselves would live, but never yet attained.

At times, with changeful Nature *en rapport*,
Wish that I might be taken up again
In the vast evolutionary round:
Live, in the alga's cell, unconsciously,

The Colloquy

And conscious in the higher organisms,
In intellect of man and in the thought
Of farthest generations after me;
In Autumn, with the flowers fall asleep,
With them revive in the new life of Spring,
In worlds not yet created, reappear;—
The hope, that by some chance, the human soul
Surviving an eternal entity,
Will be caught up by some new stream of life,
To be a conscious being, as on Earth.
But oftener I have the wish, the thought,
To live in the grand general consciousness;
As often asking if there may not be
A grander outcome sometime, in some world
Or state of being than our consciousness
With its illusions; sometimes have the thought
Of love divine or pity there may be,
The Soul of Nature greater than all powers;
In all, encircling all, and bearing all
Into its infinite repose and peace.

Avaunt, ye childish superstitions! dreams!
Only this narrow choice is left to us:—
To die as cowards die, or to believe
Blindly in the impossible, or nerve
Ourselves with fortitude against the time
Of death, or helpless with Earth's miseries
And wrongs, renounce all exercise of will
And tranquilly behold existence fade
To nothingness; life and the world itself
Woeful and pitiable, thus bring to end."

CONVERSATION XI

THE WORLD OF ILLUSION. BY THE EREMITÉ

I

WE all are striving, running each his way,
We know not whither, but that Destiny
Thus goads us on, thus tortures with unrest;
Like Ió crazed or one of old possessed.

Our longings are a fathomless abyss
Which nothing fills: our aims how sure to miss!
Or reaching, find not worth the coveting;
Our hopes, so many phantoms taking wing.

Power and place, what baubles to allure!
Fame, wealth, applause, to whom are they secure?
Youth, beauty, pleasure, they are of a day—
One knew when saying, *All is vanity*.

Our life, sad, short,—that all our wishes cheats,
A promise made, which never payment meets;
A will, postscript with troublous codicils,
Given unasked, encumbered with its ills.

The Colloquy

The gifts of Nature, how unequally
Conferred on men! Birth is a lottery—
The few to fortune born, to own, oppress;
The many born to want and wretchedness.

How many delve that one a prince may live!
Or die, the conqueror a name to give!
Croesus, thou hast thy gold; but what the toil
Of those who gathered it and wrong and spoil!

And the vain, greedy race and covetous,
Untamable, piratic, murderous,
Refuses still fraternal love and peace,
From old despotic bondage full release.

As youths bar out their teachers Christsmas day,
To have a treat or time for merry play,
So older ones, in very wantoness,
Their monitors turn from them and repress.

Its wisest, holiest, the race denies,
Betrays its Christ, mocks him and crucifies;
Exiles the patriot, the prophet stones—
Applauds the fools and fattens idle drones.

Men have tried long to outwit Destiny—
To circumvent their ills—with what dismay
And rout! confused like Babel's builders all
And Chinese, raising their stupendous wall.

Conversation ⅩⅠ

Some for the care, the grief, the troubled mind,
In pleasure and carouse the cure would find;
As luckless, wretched men, and burdened sore,
In drink would drown their woes and have them
more.

One thinks that bliss is found in great estate,
Hence lives and strives but to accumulate:
Fool! not to know how much one may possess
And still lack comfort, ease, and happiness.

In vain our gathering of Earthly store,
With plenty not content, but seeking more;
With selfish greed through robbery and spoil,
Taking yet others' goods and heavy toil.

Death comes: what more does proudest monarch
own,
With crown, with scepter, on the lofty throne,
And underneath rich canopy of state,
Than naked beggar starving at his gate?

With knowledge one would smooth life's brambled
path;
But as the heated blade, put in a bath
Of oil, gains edge to cut, so it is found,
Wisdom makes sharp the thorns the more to wound.

None has secured to man pure happiness,
Exemption none from evil, wrong, distress;
Turned not from poverty the long lament,
Nor brought with wealth and luxury content.

The Colloquy

None has fulfilled the end of prophecy,
None yet has taken the world's sin away;
Nor fitted yet redemptive scheme or creed
To man's despair and world of want and need.

And Justice, where secure ? where Equal Right ?
Where Liberty, against Oppressive Might ?
What perfect law, state, or society ?
And where a science of morality ?

And thou, too, lookest Heavenward in vain,
To height of bliss, thou never canst attain :
Nowhere is that existing thou wouldst find—
Immortal world and ease and peace of mind.

The stars are self-consuming as the Sun,
And planets through their virile cycles run,
Nor always vital force may have to lend,
While life, wherever nourished, comes to end.

If we could visit every world in space,
We should not find in one a deathless race;
Should hear on every one the mournful cry,
Lamenting wrong, loss, pain, calamity.

Nor think to find above, beyond this sphere,
A voice responding to thy waiting ear :
The secret thou wouldst know none will reveal—
There is not any answer to appeal.

Conversation ㊦

The gods and dæmons we would bribe or charm,
Have not the power to help us or to harm.
This Gautama has taught: *It is in vain,*
Asking the gods for food or health or rain.

Nor sacrifice, nor gold, nor hymn, nor prayer,
Moves them to soothe your sorrow, ease your care:
Not one of them, for all your costly gifts,
Once answers you, your heavy burden lifts.

II

How restless all are with this worthless lot!
Alike with what we have and have not got;
Vexed that so little of ourselves we know,
And vexed the more, when one our worth would
show:

All chafing in this mailed environment,
Mid never ceasing murmur, discontent;
And desperate, despairing, will not choose
Enduring good nor cheating sin refuse.

Such is the sad estate of man on Earth,
Who, without asking or consent, had birth;
Came crying, naked, helpless from the womb,
As wretched, helpless, goes down to his tomb.

Our life, how little worth its painful cost!
In pain begun, in pain at last is lost.
But dreaming something is, we claim a prize—
It dazzles and dissolves before our eyes.

The Colloquy

And what are we but phantoms moving here ?
Were not—a moment are—then disappear:
Shapes, as in dreams, go chasing through the mind,
As moanings sometimes heard in Autumn wind.

A cry, a moan, a piteous distress!
From the unconscious waked to consciousness,
And world of woe into existence brought—
Illusion! Bliss is all-sufficient naught.

Where are the living men of yesterday ?
As bubbles blown and broken when we play;
As voices heard, or ocean's deeper roar—
A cry, an echo on some caverned shore.

III

Not answered yet! Still hast the wish to live
Again? Askest the ancient faiths to give
Their secrets up? Some shade to bring to thee
Full evidence of immortality?

The life of man is as the light of day,
Forever past when once it fades away:
Another day is brought with other morn,—
Another life, when other child is born.

As one illustrates with a chariot,—
A mechanism of parts together brought,
Which, while combined, receive the power applied,
But broken or disjoined, are cast aside;

Conversation ⅩⅡ

Fragments and rubbish now to rot and rust :
So living organisms fall back to dust,
When smitten and disorganized by Death,
Nor now combine nor take the vital breath.

And fittest ending of life's misery,
The stirless sleep. *To be or not to be,*
Crazed Hamlet, thou wouldst this debate, but know :
They in their graves rest from the strife and woe.

True, most in other worlds have hoped to gain
Reward for their good deeds ; for wrong and pain
Endured the greater joy. Ah, never there
Will one Earth's sin and suffering repair !

Remember what the ancient poet said :
That will not live again which once is dead.
But what the miracles men have believed !
Christ risen, with what zeal proclaimed ! believed !

In Syrian lands to-day, where he had birth,
That prophet's dust with his forefathers' earth
Is mingled : legends, creed, and Easter song
Mislead your faith and do his grave a wrong.

IV

Illusion our beholding, and a dream,
And not the ultimate or real scheme
Of the external world and plan of life,
Are these apparent forms, their movements, strife.

The Colloquy

Illusion all, that our perception brings,—
Phantasmagoria and seeming things;
Specters that pass us by, change with the day,
We passing them ourselves as shadowy.

And all that to our senses doth appear,
Ceaseless becoming, and not presence here;
Since man creates the world subjectively,
Which, but for his idea, would not be.

Ah, to put off desire! turn from the dream!
Deny ourselves the things which do but seem!
So may Illusion's reign be brought to end,
The full redemption to be sought, attained."

CONVERSATION XII

OF THE NATURAL ORDER

ONE, a listener with me
To this deep philosophy,
When his script the Eremite
Closed up, begged me this to write:

“ In the world of want and need,—
Strife and envy, lust and greed,
Nothing lacks for tale of woe.
But the cause, if one could know,
Must show, too, the benefit
Of Earth’s pain and end of it.

Is it God who foreordains ?
Chance, or Fate, that binds in chains ?
Fiend in Hell who works us ill ?
Or sin in the human will ?
Only this is proved to me :
Nature changes ceaselessly,
And in every particle,
Latent lies the principle
That creates or that destroys—
Every energy employs—

The Colloquy

Gives to flame, to frost, to rust,
Burns to ash and grinds to dust;
Ruptures and disintegrates,
And itself insinuates
Everywhere; to everything
Brings corrosion, sickening,
Pestilent and poisoning breath,
All the agencies of Death:
Slowly, imperceptibly,
Wastes and withers; wears away,
Or it rends with violence
And strength of Omnipotence:
Wearies, troubles every life
With the care, disease, and strife:
Everywhere is enemy,
Ruinous calamity.
See its work in ages past—
Earth's accumulated waste:
Rocks and mountains ground to sand,
Seas encroaching on the land,—
Drouth and desert making gain,
On the fruitful vale and plain,
Tree and soil denuded hills,
Fountains dry and sparkling rills;
Man's proud work to ruin brought,—
Work of hand and grandest thought;
Greatest cities overthrown,
As child's cob-house tumbled down.

Bides that yet, which doth defy
What destroys thus ruthlessly,
Easily the end is seen,

Conversation 𐆆𐆆𐆆

What will be, by what has been—
Parthenon and Pyramid
With the silent cities hid ;
Proudest work that brain can plan,
Costliest by hand of man,
In the common ruin laid—
Earth in waste and nations dead ;
E'en destroying Death have end,
Thence no empire to extend.

As one sees in hour at play,
Acted, life-long tragedy,
See all human history,
In this brief epitome :
As the generations pass,
A vast, surging, warring mass ;
Each one reaching forth for best,
Little mindful of the rest ;
Falling most, where few have won,
When the war and race is done.

Ah, delusion of our life !
Sordid wish and wasting strife !
As each enters Death's dark door,
What is less or what is more ?
First to fall or first to win
Where in common all pass in ?
In the seeking, who had gain ?
In the strife, what foe is slain ?
Still abides the wrong, the sin,
Present still, the foe within—
Still the war and still the strife,

The Colloquy

For the evil is in life.
Solon knew this when he said,
Count none happy until dead.

And as vain, attempts we make,
Else than destined course to take,
Of plan laid ere Earth begun
Her swift travel round the Sun.
Vain the thought to supervise
What before creation lies,
In the flux of elements
Found the brooding of events;
Out of elemental strife
Rise and flow of stream of life,
All man's art, his passions, moods,—
Fortune's oft vicissitudes.

What our hope then ? what our joy ?
This: the powers that destroy,
Build again and populate,
Cover up the desolate
With fresh blades and foliage;
And in sterile, senile age,
Reproduce the kosmic plan,—
Heaven and Earth renew and man."

CONVERSATION XIII

EXCURSION TO MARS ** WORLD BUILDING

I

MEETING again: my quest pursuing still,
A poet who knew much of ancient lore
And versed in science took my problems up,
Giving imagination wing—discourse,
Throughout, I ween, more pleasing to the Muse
Than miseries the Eremite disclosed.

“ Presuming on thy wish to hear,” he said,
“ Something of visions seen I may unfold—
Conjectures, dreams, may be realities
That shall not weary or o’ercloud with gloom.

As Jewish patriarchs thought to relate
The generations of the Heaven and Earth,
So one might tell the life of all the worlds,—
Beginning, youth, maturity, and end;
Something of life in all where life exists,
Something of mind on all and its employ.

Observe the rising of the planet Mars:
It is a world in all much like our own,

The Colloquy

Making unwearied circle of the Sun ;
Older apparently and nearer end
But nourishing a youthful, fruitful life.
It has its Arctic cold, its Tropic heat,
Its day and night with seasons of the year,
While the blue heaven spreads out above it far
And deep with its innumerable stars.
It has its fertile lands and desert wastes,
Its mountain heights above adventurer's tread,
Its regions still unknown, or land or sea,
Around the frozen circles of its poles ;
Till lately had its undiscovered isles,
The fairest of its lands unvisited.
Its people, very like ourselves in shape,
Have too our vices and infirmities ;
Tempted as we, and fallen under sin.
And all die sometime, somehow—in their wars,
Of sickness, accident, and wasting age ;
One generation after other one
Laid in their quiet unremembered graves.

They have as we their many industries :
One tills the land, another sails the seas ;
One labors at the forge, one, at the loom ;
One teaches war, and one, the arts of peace.
Some live alone to help those of their kind,
And some, most generous to those unborn,
Plant the slow-growing trees whose fruit they know
Will never ripen for themselves to eat.

Most varied their pursuits. Their bards attempt
The highest passions and sublimities

Conversation §1111

When singing of the gods and war and love;—
To memory commit the hero's deeds,
And mournfulest of Martial tragedies,
Investing worthiest with deathless fame.
Once women told their lamentable tales
Of husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers slain,
Led captive and in hopeless slavery sold;
And maidens told of lovers far away—
In war, on sea, in strange lands wandering.
Their priests read still their ancient oracles
And effete laws and creeds long since outgrown;
Still to the superstitious and devout
Give ear at the confessional and sell
Them relics, pardons, and indulgencies.
Saviors have taken on themselves to bear
The sins and sorrows of the Martial race,
Urging their penances and ritual
And abstinence to free from all desire.
And they have their wise minds who think to solve
The saddest,—the most troublous mysteries
And deepest problems of the Universe:
Lone, lofty minds, a few, misunderstood,
Because advanced beyond those of their time;
And some, who out of hardest circumstance,
Calamity, neglect, misfortune, wrong,
Brought eloquence, song, hopeful prophecy,—
The priceless gifts to those in after age;
Or bred in mournful, melancholy place,
In haunts of vice and in the very hells,
Yet spoke for God, the soul, and liberty.
And they have teachers and philosophers
Forever in dispute; their theories

The Colloquy

Diverse, conflicting, contradictory,—
Doctrines of Trinities, Infinitudes,
Redemptions, Providences, Covenants,
Of Fate, Foreordination and Free Will.
And some defend dogmatically creeds
Themselves do not believe nor comprehend,
While bigots put in ban and persecute
Faiths other than their fathers formulate.
Metaphysicians they have who deny
That anything exists; bold Infidels,
Agnostics, Atheists, born to question faith
Or to protest against authority,
With sophists, who judged by their fallacies
And commonplace, presume that all are fools.
They have their charlatans and demagogues
As self-contained as any on the Earth;
In sorriest decadence of the arts,
Their mountebanks who would revitalize
The master-workers of the former times.
And they have, too, their idle populace,
Maintained in luxury by others' toil;
Their men and women in society,
A silly set, who crave to be admired,—
Who publish to the farthest ends of Mars
Their blank inanities and vanities.

One glories in his matchless eloquence,
Another in his comeliness of form,
In personal adornment other one.
In evil only some find their delight,
To shame and ruin bringing other ones.
Some to amuse the vulgar multitudes

Conversation §1111

Their native beauty wantonly display ;
By histrionic art and tragic pose,
Or wondrously arrayed, evoke applause.

They have their parties, greedy for the spoils,
Their partisans in never ending strife,
Their agitators always seeking cause
For change and urging radical reforms,—
Communists, Socialists, and Nihilists
Who find the remedy for every ill
In readjustment of Society.
Land-hungry nations rob and spoil the weak,
Or jealous potentates, ambitious chiefs,
Engage the populace in war to gain
Despotic personal supremacy,—
Napoleons with overmastering wills
And Cæsars greater for their millions slain ;
They have had tyrants who corrected wrongs
And conquests helping Liberty and Right,
Real advancement and prosperity
Only with free and honest government.

They have their wars, crimes, murders, miseries,
Their present wrongs and wrongs of ages past ;
A record of disheartening memories,
Of nations whose sole claim to greatness rests
On what they won from weak in bloody strife,
And lives of kings of whom they but relate
Their brutal cruelty and deathful deeds ;
Traditions of their ancient tribes and clans
Engaged in piracy and robbery,
And chiefs and heroes of the earliest time

The Colloquy

Who with wild beasts and monstrous giants warred,
Or purged the land from theft and villainy,
With a long bead-roll worthier of fame,
Their murdered patriots and martyred saints.
And they have lands, impoverished, desolate,
Once populous and great in wealth and power,
Whose treasures are their ruins, tombs—remains
And monuments now piteously held:
Possessions, too, that pleases more to tell,—
Their progress, freedom, comfort, luxury,
Laws, learning, arts, and the humanities;—
Rough-hewn, archaic, kyklopean piles
Refined to delicate and exquisite,
A real renaissance, as well, reforms:
Their world of beauty, love, and happiness,
Of good and right to set against the wrong.

They have their records of a host of gods
In twilight like our own, their Golden Age
And their lost Paradise to which they oft
Recur in times calamitous; like us
Their dim traditions of far ancestry
Who were as gods or had descent from them.
Moreover they live in expectancy,
Perennial, of a millennium;
Or dying, have the hope to live again
Immortal with the father of their race;
Like us, their fond illusions cherishing,
Believing most in the unseen, unknown.”

Conversation 𐆆𐆆𐆆

II

I said to him, " This may be true of Mars,
Bearing to Earth his marked resemblances,
But hardly can it be supposable
That on the Earth are found the types of life
Of all the other worlds inhabited,—
The planets seen or those supposed to move
Around the multitudinous fixed stars.
And what strange beings may be living there!
Greater and wiser and more beautiful
Than men—and women, if one may excel
In any sphere Earth's fairest, loveliest,—
Eve, Helen, Cleopatra, Beatrice:
Worlds where the ignorant are wiser than
Our learned philosophers and scientists,
As there are doubtless worlds where animals
Are better learned and mannered than Earth's men:
Worlds old in æons when the Earth was young,
Advanced in science, art, discovery;
Or they had set at rest before Earth was
The problems which perplex us and annoy—
Whether it is kind Providence or Fate
Or elemental forces ruling them;
Whence they have had their origin and whence
At death their souls will take their endless way;
Their ancestry, not in dispute, as here,—
Some claiming they descended from the gods
And others that they came from hairy beasts:
Worlds circling nearer or more distant suns
With other measures of the day and year;
To whose inhabitants Nature presents
A spectacle more wondrous than yet seen

The Colloquy

By man, or dream or vision has disclosed :
Worlds moving in the light of double suns
Of varied coloring, whose atmosphere
Shades not as that of Earth from light to dark
But saffron-tinted as the East at morn,
Or roseate or as auroral streams :
Worlds where red foliage predominates
And stars look down on them from firmaments
Of crimson depths : worlds of such vast expanse
That their inhabitants may never think
To circumnavigate or find what lies
At their antipodes, so wide the sea
And so immeasurably great the land,—
Infinite oceans which no one may cross
And continents so wide none can explore ;
Or mountains rise to such prodigious heights,
Himala, Andes, Alps, compare with those
In altitude as ant-hills with themselves :
Worlds where the days are as a month of Earth
With months and years of corresponding length,
Whose people, reckoned by our solar time,
Live, as the fables tell, the patriarchs
Lived in the earliest age—through centuries
And think them robbed of life when Death appears :
Worlds where the year is of Earth's seasons' length,
Whose people quickly take to pleasure's ways
Like butterflies to wing—as quickly die.”

III

My flight at end, the Poet, answering, said,
“ In telling of the wonders of the heavens,

Conversation ❧❧❧❧

Far short imagination and our dreams
Will ever fall from the reality.
Observe the stars in the vast tract of heaven;
Or shown the strife of gaseous vortices,
Or curdling mass of meteoric dust,
Holding as its potentialities
Its suns, its planets and their satellites,
As well their precious latent energies,
Inherency of life, and consciousness:—
One, a faint mist or haze of nebula,
Formless and far diffused through outer space,
Another one, condensed, a brighter mass,
Its atmosphere, the measure of a plane
Marking the orbit of its future worlds:
Another one, illumining the heaven,—
Pure flame, the brightest now of all the stars.
Or other see, a planetary world,
In incandescence and self-luminous,
Waiting its trillion years to calm and cool,—
To still its strifeless elements and fit
Its habitable parts for dawn of life.
See other world whose isles and continents
Are yet so many lava floating shells,
Its seas impended in its atmosphere:
And one, a world rich in its organisms,—
Fertile, luxuriant, and beautiful,
But passing now through vast climatic change;
Its orbit from the nearly-circular
Through some disturbances by other spheres
To the elliptic shape prolonged, its line
Of equinoxes perpendicular
Now with the longer axis of its path,

The Colloquy

Causing those oscillations of its climes,—
Its Southern Hemisphere in genial warmth,
In Northern one, the circumpolar cold
Advancing far throughout its Temperate zone;
Its depths of firn, encroaching on its life—
Entombing all; its streams of ice and drift
Abrading its most ancient continents,
Or slope or plain, and ploughing deep its vales;
And borne still o'er the glaciated wastes
The vapors from the heated Tropic seas,
Deep mantling clouds and dark that fall in snow.
Observe another one, with Tropic clime
Extending to its Polar latitudes,—
A world whose living never upright stood,
But fish-like swim or creep forth serpent-like,
Or saurian-like wing-handed rise in flight,—
Creatures in panoply of scale and shell,
Horrid and hideous of monstrous birth;
Its vegetation, coarse and flowerless
The most,—moss, lichen, fern, and calamite.
Yet wondrous is the promise of this world
And hope within its crawling, loathsome life:
One creature prophesies:—it sometime will
Rise up in scale of being and to sense
And knowledge of itself through quickened nerves
And growing brain. What now doth gorge itself
By times, then torpid lies a senseless mass,
Waits yet experience, higher mental growth
Which man, himself, who walks the Earth erect
Still waits, and ages and eternities
Still watch and wait.

Conversation §1111

Another world is dead
In its maturity, a cinder mass;
Its surface furrowed, scarred with gaping rents,
Craters and yawning chasms—enormous depths!
Cold, waste, and desolate and destitute
Of all that breathes; its countless forms of life
Forever in its barren rocks entombed:
And over all its deathsome surface lie
Thick strewn its vestiges of handiwork,
Of architecture, sculpture, pottery,—
Tiles, columns, friezes, statues, vases, urns;
Cut gems and cameos; coins, jewelry,
With instruments and implements of war,
The chase, of husbandry and useful arts,—
Yet beautiful in its calamity
And stillness of its endless solitudes,
Shining so softly with its borrowed light.
Still other world,—smitten so long of Death,
Its rocks are crumbling, falling into space
In clouds of dust and trailing meteors.

IV

But pitiable this meager history
When found related to unnumbered spheres
And evolutions of eternities!
How vast the Universe! how wondrous far
Our vision spreads in this immensity!
Nearing no boundary in height or depth,
No diminution of the multitude
Of worlds forever onward traveling.
How few of us have counted all the stars

The Colloquy

Which to the naked eye are visible!
Yet millions more, the telescope reveals
And millions yet beyond the camera,
Five hundred million systems, may be more;—
Star clusters so immensely numerous,
Thick sown as in \odot Centauri,
In 47 Toucani, or massed
Throughout the measureless galactic belt,
Such the perspective of infinity:
This of the calculably seen and known,
Not of infinitudes that lie beyond.
In miniature, what worlds the microscope
Reveals to us, till late invisible
And undiscoverable, or chemistry
Enables us to weigh and demonstrate!
What wonders in the Universe unseen
By us, relating to phenomena!—
The varied energies, or weight or heat,
Repulsion, permanent polarity;
With these the subtle ether, filling space,
Elastic, permeable, and volatile,
Yet firm as adamant, transmitting light
And warmth and energy from suns to worlds,
And tremors that involve the farthest stars.

V

And who has measure or comparison
Of what the people of those worlds achieve?
For poet has not sung nor scribe has told
In full the exploits of a single race,
Our own, and one world's art and industry.

Conversation §1111

If, as the Eremite would have us know,
Men have been martyrs to their enterprise,
To luxury and to magnificence,
There is the compensation visible
In vast domains secured, in mighty works,
In plenty found, and comfort,—happiness.

What conquests man has gained o'er elements
Inhospitable and intractable!
Lifting their adamantine barriers up
Defiantly and spreading wide the floods,
Or snows or desert sands or wilderness.
And what the structures that his hands have
raised!—

Egypt's eternal pyramids and tombs,
Her marvelous colossi, obelisks,
Hypostyle halls and courts and avenues;
Lifting the mighty colonnades at Thebes,
At Memphis,—Philæ's sculptured propylons,
Baalbec's enormous bases, columns, roofs,—
Corinthian capitals, entablature:
Reared Anurajahpoora's dagobas,
Cuzco's huge portals, stairways, cornices,
And Babylon's stupendous walls and towers,
Her hanging gardens, temples, palaces,
The glory and the wonder of the world,
And walls and palaces of Nineveh.
Built edifices, palaces, baths, tombs
In Ake, Mitla, Uxmal, and Palenque,
In Mayapan, Papentla, Cholua,
In Tulu and Teotihuacan.
Built beautiful Palmyra, Carthage, Tyre;

The Colloquy

Athen's proud Parthenon and citadel;
Rome's amphitheaters, basilicas,
Triumphal arches, forum, Pantheon.
Laid at Persepolis those floors of stone,
Or palace-platform named,—the enterprise
Of ancient Achæmenian dynasty,
Supporting once its royal audience-halls,
Its sculptured stairways, pillared porticos,—
Its ruined columns, now, and images.
At Suza, Median Ecbatana,
At Ctesephon, Seleucia, and Maydayn
Made royal courts, baths, ornamental grounds,—
The boast and the delight of Persian kings.
The famed Alhambra in Grenada built,—
By what art since surpassed in gorgeousness ?
Mosques, mausoleums, porches, courts, divans
Of indescribable magnificence
At Lucknow, Delhi, Agra, Futtehpore :
The incomparable Jumma Musjeed reared
And Khuttub Minar, palace of Belem,
The Bruges belfry, dumb Escorial,
Seville's Giraldo, Pisa's leaning tower,
And Florence' and Cremona's campaniles;
The noble Capitol at Washington.
And lofty and imposing monolith.
The Porcelain Tower built, the Chinese Wall
And massive Kremlin. Built, since to neglect,
The forest covered temples, palaces
In Yutacan, Cambodia, and Ceylon,
And Minæan cities and inscribéd walls
In scarce accessible Arabian wastes;
The silent cities of Mashonaland,

Conversation XIII

And lines of masonry beneath the snows
Of Arctic Greenland and Siberia,—
Majestic ruins, in their solitude,
Telling their populous and mighty past.
At Petra cut out of the living rock
Tombs, dwellings, temples, stairways, avenues.
Hollowed the cavern temples of the Nile
At Elephanta off from Malabar
And temples on the Coromandel coast;
The mausoleums of Persepolis
And hollow rock-vaults of the Husein Kuh.
And what the meaning of the last as hewn
Together in the figure of a cross?
Raised kyklopean walls, mounds, terraces,
The rude Druidic cromlechs and stonehenge,
And awful altars raised for sacrifice,
Common to paganism throughout the world,—
At Pergamon the most magnificent.
Built temples at Eleusis, Ephesus,
Dodona, Delphi, and Olympia,
At sacred Karnak, Heliopolis,
At Niko, Kamakura, Kioto,
Jerusalem the holy and Benares;
Pagodas at Madura and Tanjore,
At Trichonopoli, Savoy, Rangoon.
Built monasteries in the Russian towns
In sacred Lassa, on the further slopes
Of Himala and on the Tartar steppes;
Mosques in Damascus, Shiraz, Cordova,
Constantinople, Cairo, Mecca, Kum;
Churches with golden covered spires and domes
In Moscow, Nizhni Novgorod, Kazan;

The Colloquy

Churches in modern Rome, and convents, shrines,—
Glorious St. Peter's and the Vatican;
England's cathedrals, abbeys, stately halls,—
Vast Westminster and London Bridge and Tower
Paris' Tuilleries, salons, and boulevards.
In purest Gothic architecture built—
Cathedrals in the provinces of France,
And Germany's old Gothic minsters, seats,
And castles of her feudal royalty.
Built in the East those fortress-factories,
And trading posts and stations of defense
On either of the coasts of Africa,
The power once and wealth of Portugal,
And caravanseries in the Levant.
Or those impregnable defenses reared,—
The fortresses, Gibraltar, Cronstadt, George;
Or Holland's dikes—defenses of the land
Against the sea or the safe harbor made,—
The piers of Sidon, Venice, Amsterdam.
The Roman highways built and aqueducts,
Peru's acequias, frowning terraces,
And India's vast irrigating works.
Wide firth and mightiest of rivers spanned
With cantilever or suspension bridge,
And under cities, under river beds,
And through the mountain's base, the tunnel bored.
With these our endless kinds of mechanism,
Enormous furnaces and power plants,
Huge factories, commercial palaces;
Fleets, transports, wharves, warehouses, granaries,
Far-reaching railway lines and telegraph.
In ornamental architecture raised

Conversation ㄱㄴㄴㄴ

The slender obelisk and minaret,
The castle turret and cathedral spire ;
And placed the fluted columns, long arcades
And monumental sculptures, bas-reliefs,
And airy arches, lace-work arabesques ;
Or fretted ceilings, stucco-fligree
Veil-like in its transparency, or as
The gold and azure of the firmament.

Aye, if all of the worlds in space repeat
These industries or vastly them exceed,
We may not even think to comprehend
These aggregations of constructiveness
Throughout the Universe. But wondrous more
Is the provision of the elements,
In that, together with the embryos
Of life, they held in latency the type
Of all this handiwork : in atom once,
In nebula and gaseous, fiery star,
The steaming seas and frozen continents.
Or in their ceaseless motion, endless strife,
Give energy to suns or bring to birth
And feed all living things, or they bring forth
This varied veiling of appearances,
Whether illusion or reality,
That is the glory of the Heaven and Earth."

CONVERSATION XIV

FURTHER INQUIRIES ** RESTATEMENTS IN
TELEOLOGY.

THE Poet having finished his discourse
All in the Chapel spoke in praise of it,
None more delighted with it than myself,
Yet wished that in his observations made,
Pertaining to the Universe, he had
Unriddled somewhat of its mystery,
Omission which led me to ask again
About the underlying cause of things.

Reviewing briefly his survey, I asked,
“ Is this as the unknowing forces wrought ?
Or by the flux of elements brought forth,
By molecules in blind passivity,
By the World-Will, unconscious, undivine,
By aimless chaos in vast aggregate,
Dissolving, forming—thoughtless, recordless,
Till man, born of the earth, came to have speech,
The wonders of the Kosmos to declare ?
But chance, what of its possibilities ?
How may a power not intelligent,
Sustain so wondrously or recreate ?

Conversation XLV

How measure forces, distances, and time,
For the revolving of the milliard spheres
In order of eternal harmony ?—
On ether-oceans cushioning the worlds,
Making the Earth seem motionless to us
When spinning on its axis like a top,
When on its annual journey round the Sun,
When with the Solar System onward borne
With swiftness of the thunderbolt's descent ?
Or it keeps full the fires of all the suns
Or on the molten spheres, as Earth once was,
Lays firm and deep the adamantine crusts
And spreads the waters forth. Or lifted up
Earth's continents and made depths for the sea ?
In later time, ground up the ledge and reef
To sand and silt, or burned the ancient rocks
To ash and cast them forth, till soft and deep
The mellow soil, and warm and nourishing,
Lay over the wide world, or hill or vale ;
So nearly balancing accretive means
With the erosive that the continents
Rise not in every part to frozen heights,
Nor waste before the waves ? Or now lifts up
The clouds to heaven,—permitting their return
In mist and vernal shower and later rain,
And yet the mighty waters which descend
In Amazon, or Orinoco's floods ?
Or caused such full provision to be made
To store the waters up ?—In mountain wilds,
Secured those ample reservoirs,—lakes, springs
Perennial, whence flow the rills and streams ?—
Tumultuous energies that ceaselessly

The Colloquy

Nourish the Earth and feed the Ocean's life,—
That at man's bidding, grind and spin and delve
And carry forth the commerce of the world!
Acting unconsciously, or purposeless,
Inclined the Earth to the Ecliptic plane,
Making so great area habitable
And varying the seasons of the year ?

How came the elements to be endowed
With all those wondrous latent properties ?
Did they unconsciously evolve the laws
That govern them ? Unconsciously adjust
The atom's surface to affinities,—
Complexities so numerous ? Or weigh
The definite proportions which combine
In compounds, or, as simple substances,
Anticipate the synthesis of forms
Of Matter and of living organisms ?
Unconsciously devise those measurements,
Proportionate, exact in everything ?
Or ever the proportions which exist
Between the planetary distances
And distance of the leaves, distributed
On the ascending axis of the plant ?
Or the numerical simplicity
Of leaves in spiral turns around the stem ?
Or set so intricately, orderly,
The echinus' spines and polyp's tentacles ?
Do they give the vibrations of the air
A rhythmic harmony and melody ?
Prismatic colors, to the rays of light ?
To substances, to heat, to energy,

Conversation XLV

The readiest convertibility ?
Do they provide the laws of gravity,
Determining the orbits of the worlds ?
Their weight and pressure of their atmospheres ?
Provide the chemic properties, that bind
The molecules into coherent forms;
Of hardness, toughness, as the diamond,
The adamantine spar and steel and bronze ?
Provide as well repulsions, opposites
To rend, disintegrate, corrode, consume ?—
Liquid or gaseous diffusiveness
And instability of nitrogen ?
Or give to man, to Nature, binding law,—
To each permitting freedom unrestrained ?

And have the primal energies, by chance
Or accident, evolved the precious stones ?
The topaz, amethyst, and sapphire's hue,
Or yellow, purple, or cerulean ?
The inward flame and green of emeralds ?
The diamond's pure dazzling rays of light ?
The ruby's deep, rich-red, and white of pearls ?
Or filled, with riches inexhaustible,
The mine, the quarry, and alluvial plain ?
Or laid up in the Earth those priceless stores
Of rocks, gems, crystals, metals, ambers, oils,
And reservoirs of gas ? In Greenland laid
The plentiful preserve of cryolite ?
In Chili, nitrate beds ? In our own land,
The phosphates, kaoline, lime, salt, and marl ?
Laid crystals in the cavities of rocks
And filled the fissures of the rocks with gold ?

The Colloquy

In Ophir, scattered the auriferous soils ?
Among the forest mountains of Sajan,
In the Witwatersrand, South Africa,
In Californian rift and river bed,
In drift of Ballarat and Bendigo,
In frozen gravel of the Yukon vales ;
The precious adamantiferous clays
Deposited at Kimberley, and sands,
Sparkling with gems in India and Brazil ?
Or mindless, purposeless, did they evolve
From coarser kinds the finer, nobler type ?
From spongy and unseemly stalk and club,
Fern-like, or leafless, flowerless, bring forth
The highly differentiated trees,—
Wide leaved and blossoming and bearing fruit,
Yielding their grateful shade and useful wood ?
From the wild grass evolve the golden wheat,
Wide cultivated maize and sugar cane ?
From crab or thorn, the apple and the pear ?
From rank and bitter weeds and poisonous,
The vegetable's tender leaves and roots,
Pot-herb and salad and the heating spice ?
Or gave the cluster of the vine its juice ;
Pulp to the cherry, plum, and luscious peach,
The cooling lemon, orange, fig, and date ?
Sweet to the melon ? acid to the lime ?
To berries sourness mingled with the sweet,
And color that adorns the apple's rind ?
Or in the growing trees deposited
The balsams, resins, starch, elastic gum,
In plants, medicinal and fragrant oils ?
In flowers, sweet perfumes and the pliant wax ;

Conversation #10

Deep in their cups, the nectar-like conserve,
The fertilizing insects to allure ?
Unconsciously and purposeless adapt
So wondrously and to such varied use,
Bud, leaf, stalk, trunk, bark, fibre, petal, husk,
Sap, grain, and fruit ? As wondrously enrobe
The world with foliage to please the eye ?

Not that I would ignore, or slightly
Pass by the teaching of the physicist,
That our sensations cheat us all the while
With phantom worlds and images of things,
And that no color is, nor density,
Nor ever any form ; these qualities,
As we experience them, but the effects
Of varied movements of the molecules ;
That the external world, objectively,
Is not the organized completeness seen,
But that it is as we imagine it ;
Or we create its order, harmony.
Though little it is easier to account
For what appears than for reality.

Long I have asked, nor had the answer yet :
What was the antecedent cause of all ?
What was before this wondrous web of laws
Holding the equipoise of energies ?
How did the first unfolding effort find
The line of least resistance ? So begin
The series of creative processes ?
How came the simpler substances to pass
To multiform ? the incoherent, change

The Colloquy

To the coherent ? the indefinite
Change to the definite ? Or the world-stuff
Existent first, chaotic, far-diffused,
Whence came the tendency to aggregate,
Forming the denser mass and luminous,—
Spiral or heliacal nebula,
Or gaseous spheres, or habitable worlds ?
And whence came the first germs of life ? And
whence,
Their latent reproductive energies :—
Their tendencies to differentiate,
Developing from unicellular
To multicellular,—from single types,
Interminable multitude of forms
That swim, or creep, or fly, or leap, or walk,
Or house themselves in shell,—and with these, man,
Glorious o'er all and proudly dominant ?
And as relates to living organisms
How came the primal elements to make
Provision so exhaustless, permanent ?—
That for all time unvaryingly maintains
The ratio of the sexes, or supplies
So constantly, minutely, evenly,
Carbon dioxid as all life has need ?—
Or the provision still more marvelous
For the remarkable fecundity
Which always follows after war and plague ?

And by what chance did these originate
The latencies, potentialities,
Prophetic, formative of higher type,
In evolution of the macrocosm,—

Conversation XLV

In microcosms as individualized ?
Did force transmute itself to solid forms,
The inorganic organize and live,
And the unknowing bring forth intellect ?
And did the lowermost the highest make ?
Did function will within the simple form
The complex to evolve ? or, organless
And without senses, did itself provide
With viscera and limbs, with nerves and brain ?
Or creature, stomachless, hungry for food,
Itself a stomach made ? or one that groped
In darkness and would see, produced the eye ?
Or boneless worm, it would rise up and walk
And so created for itself a spine ?
Or to find readier escape from foes
Would rise in air and so developed wings ?
Or it would stand erect and walk as man,
So grew a heel and poised thereon its frame ?
Or it would reason and enlarged its brain ?
Or it would speak and vocal organs made
To utter the conceptions of its mind ?
Or it would gain in progress on its time,
Thence stored experience for itself and heirs ?
Or moral being willed and hence denied
Desire, greed, lust, wild vengeance, brutalism ?

And have the sensuous energies alone,
Worked upwardly to the divine ? Did these
Through the wild brutal passions lay the plan
To saintly piety and purity ?
Alone, made hunger, lust, the strife and wrong,
The way of spiritual development ?

The Colloquy

Or the provision made, that savage tribes
At war one with another, should evolve
A higher manhood ? Out of brutishness
Bring virtue, kindness, love, sympathy ?
Out of despotic rule and servitude,
Evolve the peoples' rights and liberties ? ''

CONVERSATION XV

THE UPWARD WAY

I

I ENDED my inquiries, far prolonged,
So fruitful proved the theme—to answer them
A number present in the Chapel rose
But yielding soon the privilege to one,
A savant, peer of all the physicists.

“ If thou hast care to hear,” he first observed,
“ Some further revelation I may make
Of Earth as she evolved and of her life,
Continuing, if I may so presume,
My friend, the Poet’s marvelous discourse.

No longer is it needful to defend,
As once, the claims of science or refute
The estimates of the chronologists,
For man, ere our chronologies began,
Was then such old inhabitant of Earth
He filled it with his ruins and his tombs.
Grave rises over grave, and under all
Lie our first ancestors and first of kin.

The Colloquy

No! not in consecrated ground as now,
Or burial marked with pious epitaph,
Were these entrusted unto memory,
And not at Tiryns nor Mycenæ found,
In Troad, Sais' plain, nor Ghizeh's tombs:
In mound, in midden, drift, bog, lake, and cave,
Is written our forefathers' history.

Nor is there need for lengthy argument
To prove as mythical the narratives
And earliest traditions of mankind,
Through ages sacred deemed, in which are told
How the good gods in the beginning made
The worlds and seeds of all the living things,
In their own likenesses creating men,—
And how the wicked gods and jealous brought
The evil in the world and sin and death.
For life came not, as in the fables told
And Jewish and Chaldean Genesis,
By sudden advent or through miracle.
And death is not the consequence of sin,
Nor is it fate or of Infernal born,
Furious, implacable, and treacherous;
Nor is it universal in the world,
As thought, nor an essential attribute
Of matter, as the opposite of life,
Nor a necessity, primarily,
But being secondarily acquired
In adaptation to the various ends
Of life's competitive development
And means thereto. As one has lately said,
Death is the price paid for complexity:

Conversation 𐆆

For nothing died of the first organisms,
The individuals, plants, or animals,
Being so many reproductive cells,
Continuously rejuvenized themselves,
While the more complex, multicellular,
Burdened with functions, organs numerous,
And complicated systems, wearied, aged,—
A prey thence to decay, disease, and death,
And only in their offspring living on.

II

As thou in asking didst anticipate
This is the order of the Upward Way :
In variations found, in want, in love,
By natural selection brought about ;
The complex following the simple form,
Or function when it has a need creates
And localizes organs for its use,
Or differentiation has improved
Upon the lower, simpler organisms ;
As men, successful in affairs, rebuild
Their growing traffic to accommodate.
And what advancement from the poverty
Of the most ancient life, the intellect
And capability of man presents !
And wonderful the record of ascent
From lowest up, as Earth has kept account,
Inerrable and inerasable !
Thyself hast read this, in the rock and drift :
That which preceded what is uppermost
Was dwelt on by the apes and not by man,

The Colloquy

In lower surfaces dwelt lower forms,
Less complex kind and less intelligent.
And nothing of Earth's later, higher life,
But had its origin in simpler kind.
The birds, that soar aloft in azure heights,
Perfect in wing and perfectly adorned,
Descended from the low, reptilian forms;
Their reptile parents, from amphibia
Which had the fishes for their ancestors.
Fish-like, amphibian-like, ourselves once were:
The functions of our bodies, that appear
In periods of Lunar time, retain
Traces of our primordial life on shores
Washed by the tides. Moreover, man repeats
In embryo and ante-natal growth,
The evolution of all animals."

I, interrupting him, observed, " This told,
I know not how I have become myself
And not another personality :—
Why I am man, raised from these lower kinds;
Why these, not men, are with the lower still
Nor making now perceptible advance."

Persisting in his argument, he said,
" We bear the history of our descent,
Fixed ineradicably. Parts, which still
Are perfect in the animals, in us
Survive in dwarfed and shrunken rudiments,—
Discarded as from them we make advance.
These bodies, now erect, and once believed
To have been specially created thus,

Conversation XV

Share with all life a common lineage
And common method of development.
This is our lineage, if we would know:
Found in the alga or amœba's cell,
In boneless worm, lancelet and ganoid-fish;
Dipnoi, amphibian, reptile-vertebrate,
Marsupial-mammal, lemur, man-like ape,—
Deriving thus in an unbroken line.
Our life from very first and lowest forms.

When in humility our fathers taught,
That we are kindred of the worm, they reached,
Unwittingly, the truths which scientists
Out of profoundest research have proclaimed.
See what the elements had prophesied,
And what the lowest of all organisms!
The crystals striving upward into life,
Assuming mossy arborescent shapes,
Or budding, growing in increasing groups;
The plant with embryonic qualities
Of animals endowed—with tendency
To consciousness, to personality.
And in the lower animals begun,
Development of those high faculties
Esteemed the crowning glory of mankind—
Ideally man present from the first.

And wondrous the adaption in descent!
One pattern serving for such varied use:
All living things, in their development,
Beginning with the embryonic cell,—
The plant, expansion of initial bud,—

The Colloquy

The organs of the plant, the leaf transformed ;
Digestive jelly-mass and sensitive
Or membranous digestive tube the source
Of all the organs of the animal ;
And found in the first vertebra the cast
Of every bone, articulating spine
Or limb thereto, or widening a dome
The growth of cranial cavity and wall,
And in the course of evolution seen ;
The fishes' fins developing in wings
Of birds, in jointed fore-limbs and the paws
Of animals, in human arms and hands ;
Their scales in down and feathers of the bird,
The reptile's horny plates and hair of beasts ;
Or structures modified to suit the land,
The sea, the air, vicissitudes of clime ;
Each kind new organs adding as they need
Or casting off such as encumber them ;
Acquiring colors which attract their kind
And such as render them conspicuous ;
Or shading, coloring, in mimicry,
In what best serves to shield them or conceal ;—
The latent type, scarcely perceptible,
Developing to take supremacy
As in the evolution of the spine,
With it, the convolutions of the brain ;
A pigmentary spot found on the worm
Unfolding for the windows of the mind,
Or fissure on its skin developing
The chain of auditory ossicles
And labyrinths with comely outward ear ;
Or crimped, blunt, laryngeal membranes brought

Conversation ƒv

To a free median edge and tuned to song
And varied utterance; or speech evolved
From pairing-calls and cries of animals,—
The modulations of the orator,
The earnestness of the tragedian,
A mimicry of these rude dialects,
Affecting the emotions, gesturing
And pose once natural; the chattering
Of scolding apes becoming humanized
By slow transitions into forms and words
And sentences that served Demosthenes,
Avitus, Milton, Shakespeare, Molière.

From first the fittest lived or herb or beast.
And how exact the order of descent!
Since every species had its origin
Always coincident in time and place
With pre-existent near-related forms.—’

“ But man rose up,” I said, “ the serpent creeps
His way.”

And he, continuing, replied,
“ Arrested, fixed in its development,
Or retrograding from a nobler form.
The reptiles are a dying family
Which once held the dominion of the Earth.
No less, man, peerless in his intellect,
Has through these living gradients risen up
In common struggle for existence here.

We may not easily repudiate
Our lineage, such ample evidence

The Colloquy

Of evolution and heredity,
These bodies, built by others than ourselves,
As were the institutions which we boast,—
The crumbling skeletons of animals,
Long since extinct, the stairway we have climbed.

Hast made a study of the orang-utan,
And hast compared it with ourselves ? Or seen
The fierce gorilla's hands ? the teeth of apes ?
The gibbon's face ? or seen the mimicry
As these collectively affect our kind ?
Wouldst say that these are not our relatives ?
Nor may we put away resemblances
We bear to a remoter kin,—the lives
Of countless creatures that reflect ourselves
In part, or we owe them some quality.
Whatever lives is in relationship
With all—united in the plan of growth
And to one universal law conformed.
And mutual the relation found between
The vital forces and the physical ;
In essence one the many elements,
By varied aggregations all evolved."

I said, repeating what before I urged,
" The tribes of creeping things and animals
Find soon their limit of ascent while man
Has reason, conscience, sense of the divine ;
Progresses, conquers, plans, originates,
And with the changes of the universe
His unchanged body keeps in harmony."

Conversation XV

Ready in argument, he answered me :
“ Do not too lightly estimate the sense
And capabilities of the brute world,
Too much exalt the intellect of man
In untamed savagery and barbarism,
Or even very highest we attain,
So common when we make comparison
Between ourselves and other living things :
For animals possess intelligence
Of no mean order and have qualities
Moral and social—genius, some of them,
Approaching if not equal to mankind ;
Many possessing powers that exceed
All human venture and sagacity :
In every species variations found
As countless as the multitudes of it,
Marked individual physiognomy
And amplitude of personality,
Distinguishing the more intelligent.
They have affection, love, and gratitude,
The altruistic spirit—heroism,
Renunciation, and self-sacrifice,—
Vindictiveness, ambition, vanity,
Sense of the humorous, ridiculous,—
Their virtues, as the poet Cowper sung,
Their morals and the sense of shame and guilt,
The feeling of remorse and bitter grief ;
Nor lacking, as psychologists have claimed,
Time-sense and sense of continuity.
With what presentiments at times possessed !
Anticipating earthquakes, storms and floods,
The drouth of Summer and the Winter’s cold ;

The Colloquy

Sharing our dreams, our superstitions, fears
Of the inexplicable; cowardly
Where man is coward—trembles, stands in awe.
The birds leave cities smit by pestilence,
Free-roaming herds, the tainted pasture-lands;
The very rats, so William Shakespeare tells,
I vouch not for the truth, *instinctively*
Quitting a rotten carcass of a ship.
Skilled doctors too, some of the animals
In finding herbs to heal them of disease
Or fasting, bathing, when in pain or sick.
They reason, count, observe, geometrize,—
Practice their cunning arts and readily
Adapt themselves to change of circumstance;
As we, build, weave, and sow, secure their food
And exercise their various industries.
What strategists are the carnivora!
What signalists the hunted birds and beasts!
So certain to communicate alarm.
What organizers some, economists!
Assembling on occasion to consult
About migrations and the common weal,
Or interests of grave concern to them.
They have their laws regarding property,
Respecting right, their code of punishment;
The rooks and crows, in most deliberate
And solemnest tribunals, sentencing
Offending members of their tribes to death.
And found in families and social groups,
Extend to one another mutual aid,
Most kinds uniting to defend their own.
The elephant will not forget a wrong

Conversation ⅩⅦ

And keeps in memory a friendly act.
How kindly thoughtful, this unwieldy beast,
Not to put foot where it will injure one !
The monkey cares for orphans of its kind,
The pelican for aged and helpless ones
And certain rodents for their blind and maimed.
Oft the wild mother nourishes the young
Of other kind—feeds, fondles, and defends.
The orang-utan, when it has lost its mate,
Sorrows as we when of loved ones bereft ;
Like us, has dread of death, and of its scene,
And truly human-like this creature dies.
Long story, it would be, to tell in full
The wisdom of the dog and faithfulness.
Where has man shown the patient industry
Seen in the insect world ? and where his work,
Of greater cunning than the beaver's dam ?
What human architect, when building, cares
More for the sumptuous and beautiful
Than weaver-birds when working at their nests ?
And few among us that more safely build,
For comfort more, than the tarantula.
And wondrous is the skill the insects show !
Without our clever arts and use of tools
The termite builds its labyrinthine house,
The wasp, its ample paper-nursery,
The bee, its geometric comb of wax ;
And silk worms wind their delicate cocoons,
And spiders hang their webs like snow-white sails.
Yet greater tasks than those of Herakles,
Samson or Finland's wizards, size compared,
The burying-beetle easily performs.

The Colloquy

And what economy is shown by ants!
That vast confederacy, commonwealth
Of rulers, teachers, workers, warriors:—
Insects that farm and mine, divide their land,
Or build their towns with well paved avenues,
Their roads and bridges, strongholds for defense,
Their nurseries for pets, their hospitals
For maimed and weak, their vaults to store their
 food;
Or they engage in games of play, or new
Acquaintance make, or widely to their kind
Communicate the news; explore new lands,
To cultivate, and set the bounds of it;
Enslave their species and domesticate
The lower insects; spoil, avenge, subdue,
And dominate in their superior might
As the great nations of mankind have done.
How very like our own, their funerals!
Careful, as we, of caste and social rank,
Laying together their own dead at rest
And slaves and strangers in the potter's field.

The insects quite surpass us in some arts,
Such their attainments, by what methods taught,
For many of their tribes are better housed
Than are the various families of men,—
None of them hoveled like our peasantry,
A shame on our vile huts and tenements,
Our loathsome dwellings, airless, comfortless,
And mean in architectural design.

What wondrous cultivators, too, the birds

Conversation XV

And insect tribes! While man is limited
By wilderness and rock and altitude
And only sows in the alluvial vale,
On even upland and the gentle slopes,
These plant on every soil, in every zone;
In arctic dunes or wastes as pitiless
Of Labrador and Asian table-lands,
The seed of fruit and grain, or clothe the Earth
With their interminable fields of flowers:
Thick sown the meadows with the buttercup,
Daisy and dandelion, rue and phlox;
Bleak moorlands with the purple heather sown;
The violets sown and the campanula,
In mountain wilds, the gentian's azure beds,
And the sweet pennyroyal in the woods;
Planted the fragrant thyme in Grecian vales,
Through Europe northward over hill and plain,
As far as England's promontories found;
On Alpine heights, touching eternal snow,
And Pyrenean, sowed the edelweiss;
The crimson rhododendron, mid the snows
Of Himala; in many a Northern lake,
In wide expanse of the Brazilian streams
And Nile their gorgeous water-lilies set,
Or nurtured or cross-fertilized the trees
That make South Africa a land of bloom.

A pity Haeckel thought it that the bees
Are not much nearer relatives of ours.
But Nature has not lavished all her gifts
On lordly man alone; intelligence,
Expression finds in various lines of growth,

The Colloquy

One leading upward the mammalia,
And one, the insects in development.

And many are the lessons man might learn
Of virtue, cleanliness, and industry,
Many, of conjugal fidelity
From these, his humble friends, the animals.
And how on onward, upward way, mankind
Have on this vast constituency leaned !
The kindly helpful beasts whose milk and flesh
Have fed, whose fleeces, furs, and skins have clothed,
Whose patient labor has maintained and borne ;
Or worm or sloth or higher ape have held
The thread of life we now are spinning on.

St. Francis of Asissi, when he spoke
Of animals or least of living things,
My brothers and my sisters, always said.
And often as he prayed, begged God to bless
These children of his praise and handiwork,—
Would that each had this care for all that lives.”

I said to him, “ Thou dost commend to me
The sweetest sympathy and saintliness,
Yet wouldst convince me that the Upward Way
Is an interminable deathful strife.”

Returning to his argument, he said,
“ On every spot of land, in sea, in air,
There is continual war : the many kinds
Struggling for their existence, every one
Seeking advantage or supremacy :

Conversation ⅩⅤ

The weak succumbing while the stronger live,
Or wiser or the morally advanced.
Unyielding is the principle, the law
Of Nature that condemns the weak and less
Adapted to extinction and exalts
And reproduces what is worthiest.
Such mother Nature is, putting her own
Under the hardest discipline; not moved
By pain or grief, by cry to pitying,
But thrusts her weaklings and her dwarfs aside;
Makes sensuality, intoxicants,
Habits, diseases, never ceasing war,
Her ready agents to eliminate
Or bring her rueful populace to end.

III

How tortuous the course of man's advance!
Impeded, interrupted oftentimes.
How long a resident in groves! in caves!
How long in nakedness and without tools,
The use of fire and economic arts!
Or living in those far-primeval times
In wandering hordes like the gregarious brutes;
Nor language had nor sense of decency
Nor any social tie that might refine.
How long in savagery! in barbarism!
How long the slave of superstitious fear
And burden of imputed guilt and doom!
Striving the while, or losing, conquering,
No less advancing on the Upward Way
Till Nature's awful empire has been won.

The Colloquy

This was the view the Roman poet had
Of man's first state: a dumb and filthy herd
That had crept from the Earth when newly formed;
Fought with their nails, their teeth, their fists for
 mates,
For fruit, for acorns, for their hiding place;
Used cudgels next, and finally made arms,
The while inventing names for things and words
With which they could communicate their thoughts;
The wiser ones then fortifying towns,
Enacting laws and saving stores of wealth.
Not much conjecture nor our science adds,
So plain the Upward Way through want and war.

How great an influence on man the chase
And war have exercised! The search for food,
The sport, or self-defense, or conquest planned,
Spurring the sluggish masses, quickening
And sharpening the listless intellect.
What educator war! From very first
Impacting men and disciplining them;
Merging nomadic families and tribes,
Whence states and nationalities arose,
And law and order were maintained; e'en now,
The school where ignorance is forced to yield,
And Despotism and Old Conservatism
Give way to Progress, Right, and Liberty.

Not that I fail to see or purposely
Ignore what else than prodding want and war
Has urged man up to his supremacy:
What art has done, love of the beautiful,

Conversation 𐄂V

And what religion, morals, customs, laws,
And institutions of society.

What record of advance religion shows !
From naïve impressionism, totemism,
From divination, soothsay, sorcery,
From bloody sacrifices, penances,
Obscene and horrible idolatries,—
To kindly charity and love of man.”

Here interrupting him I said, “ And seen
With the advance of man in intellect
Quite other notions of the Deity:
The selfish, warring, tribal gods disowned,
With the infernal and malignant powers,
And One benign and cosmopolitan
Declared the Ruler of the Universe.”

Then he, continuing the theme, exclaimed,
“ Blest Reason, Science, Art, Philosophy,
That gained for us this great deliverance!
The banishment of the capricious gods,
And hellish broods that terrorized the Earth—
Bel, Molock, Yahveh, Amun, Indra, Zeus,
And that old dragon, Satan named by us
And Mephistopheles; the Furies, Fates,
The Hell-dog Cerberus with three fold jaw;
Haggish Silenos and goat-footed Pan,
And Bakchos, though still seen his tipsy crew;
Gnomes, Gorgons, Harpies, Ate, Lamia,
With spirits of the mountains, vales, and fens,
Of forest wilds that stalked the murky night.

The Colloquy

Blest vision! clear, since now no firmament
Divides the Heavens and the Earth and we behold
The milliard worlds, throughout Infinity,
Moving obedient to Eternal Law.

Advance as great as by religion shown
Is seen in ethics and in government,
Still greater the advance of industry
As we compare the scanty resources
Of men in savagery and barbarism
With what enlightened people have in use.

And only seen begun what is to be
In past achievements and in conquests won,
For many must be the discoveries
And the inventions that await our skill,—
Our farther industry and enterprise;
And remedy we may have and reform
For every evil in society.
What favored few have hitherto attained
All shall possess or even yet surpass:
Nor need we much presume:—in every land
There is awakening, enlightening;
In evolution of society,
Perceptible advance and permanent.
What promise in the wider intercourse
Of nations! in exchange of merchandise!
Facilities for travel,—sending news!
Our implements and our commodities
Are most efficient missionaries found
Teaching, as no religion yet has taught,
Fraternity and peace throughout the Earth.

Conversation XV

Soon men will have a common alphabet,
A common language—own a common faith,
And common laws and plan of government;
And such will be their means of traveling,
On land—on sea—through air, that they will pass
Through space with the rapidity of birds
On migratory wing from zone to zone;
And their economy improving still,
Supply their fuel less laboriously
From Earth's interior store; or, from the Sun,
Pouring abundant rays, obtain their light,
Their heat and force to use as they have need.
With other resources, meet other wants
And every new demand:—the soils enriched
By chemicals,—drained, irrigated, stirred
To greater depths; by new appliance warmed,
So far increasing their productive power
That want and famine will be driven out.
Already the realities transcend
The Psalmist's visions and the Hebrew seer's
And all the visions of Apocalypse.
Could Archimedes, Hero, Ptolemy,
Or Egypt's engineers and architects,
Awake to see our vast machinery,
Our steam, electric, and etheric powers;
Our factories, our arms, our armaments;
Our ships, cars, automobile carriages,
Networks of telegraphs and telephones,
What must be their surprise! And how surprised
The thaumaturgist and the leech of old,
Or learned Galen and Hippokrates,
Could they know of our medicines and skill

The Colloquy

In surgery,—our anesthetics, lymphs,
Preventive viruses and germicides,
The X-rays' marvelous illumining,—
Our handy instruments! Yet we, ourselves,
With others now on Earth, may live to see
Gain of invention and discovery
As far improved on ours as ours excels
The ancient wonders and conveniences;
For, with mechanical appliances,
A single century has gained for us
More than all time had hitherto bestowed."

Here interrupting him, I said, " But this
Presumes on moral and on social gain
Beyond what man at best has yet attained,—
Subordination yet of despotisms
Various in kind and powers militant;
Adjustment yet of labor, capital,
And interstate affairs; yet self-control
Of every individual, till now,
By few attempted, fewer realized."

Taking the argument again he said,
" True, as the Eremite observed, we still
Pay tribute to the old despotic powers.
No less the multitude have promise now
Not by the former generations known,
For few are found that will contentedly
Endure the wrong as did their ancestors.
The poorest and most ignorant have learned,
That there is somewhat better to be gained
And earnestly set out to win the prize,

Conversation XV

While in the past, not distantly remote,
Few rose above the station of their birth
Or chose what they would do or be, but bore
Their slavery and drudging poverty
As sent of God, unconscious, all of them,
Of what is meant by Right and Liberty.
Few ancient jurists thought to advocate
The natural and equal rights of all,
And general was the want of sympathy
Even among the kindest for those
Not of their nation, tribe, or family.
The nobleness of our great ancestors
And easy circumstance was for the few,
The upper and the ruling class, who held
The masses under them in servitude.
Though lauded the democracies of old,
None well deserved the name, so little free,—
In one, a selfish aristocracy,
In other, oligarchic despotism.
Permit me to re-write what Hegel said
Of Liberty:—the Orientals knew
That one was free, the despot ruling them;
The Greeks and Romans knew a few were free,
Themselves, served by their retinue of slaves;
The modern world has free majorities,
The coming man will know that all are free.”

“ And God be praised,” I said, “ when this is
seen.”

He answered, “ It will be when men have learned,
That necessarily the interest

The Colloquy

Of any person is the interest
Of all,—the wrong and robbery of one,
The wrong and loss of every citizen,
And that to rob or to impoverish
The people of a foreign land, we bring
Their poor and helpless soon to our own doors.
It will be, when the nations of the Earth
Have learned to yield their childish sentiments
Of reverence to titles, pageantry,
And welcome honest business government,
Nor longer settle their disputes with arms
But gain through arbitration right and peace;—
When once the habits of the race are changed
From military to industrial;
When laws, that need be general, are made
By representatives from all the Earth,—
As Greeks joined in Amphictyonic league,
In Iroquois Confederacy seen;
When Transportation finds a better code
Than pirates gave or brigands taught the use;
When Capital and Labor shall unite
In an industrial copartnership;
When those who labor are not less esteemed
Than the employer and the overseer;
When every individual has the right
To hold his property or sell at will,
The right to buy or sell as suits him best
In any market of the world; when one
Is free to travel as his pleasure leads
Or business, unmolested by the claims
Of revenue and jealous sovereignty;
As free to speak, to reason, and believe;

Conversation XV

When all who live on Earth shall have its use,
Each one, as heir, his rightful share of it."

I said, " But war continues and the wrong,
And seen industrial society
At strife throughout the whole enlightened world;
And found the law of evolution quite
As flexible as are our Christian creeds,—
A code of enmity for time of war,
A code of amity for time of peace.
Moreover thou wouldst prove that war had been
The greatest educator of mankind."

Here one, taught by the English sage, observed.
" Man is the consummation on the Earth
For which the elemental forces strove
Through an eternity, for which himself
Has striven through uncounted years, till last,
Putting beneath him all that came before
In evolutionary rivalry,
Himself subduing, perfecting in mind,
In the moralities, the strife shall cease."

Then he, who had the argument resumed:
" The prophecy the atom held fulfilled."

" A glorious prophecy," I said, " and may
Fulfillment of the dream be near. Sad, though,
The thought that when humanity attains
Its best, and Earth is truly pleasurable,—
When all inventions have been perfected,
The loftiest ideals of progress gained,

The Colloquy

Death will be present like the skeleton
At Egypt's feasts to mar the joy of it."

He answered: " Having tasted every joy,
One should not chide at death, nor think to rob
The coming generations of their time."

I said, " There is small chance that altruism
Will take away the dread of death from men.
With increase of the pleasurable in life,
Men will hate death the more. The happy state
Ourselves have thought to realize on Earth,
Replete with every joy, would bring to us
Such sorrow in the thought of leaving it
As never yet affliction laid on us.

And sad the thought, that when the world itself
Attains the height of its development,
It will thereafter hasten in decline!
Or, nourishing through æons still its life,
Nourish for war, disease, and accident.
If glaciation, as the Poet told,
Has often hitherto alternately
Covered its Temperate zones, it may again
Depopulate the Northern latitudes
Or Southern, and destroy the proudest works
Our hands may rear; or cataclysms again
Sink the unstable continents beneath
The sea, and from the deep raise other land,
It may be other life, another race.
And dreadful, inexpressibly, the thought
Of coming time, however yet remote,

Conversation १७

When the whole race, like some poor savage tribe,
Will flee from waste to waste, from want to want,
A dying remnant in a dying world."

Then he, taking the theme again replied,
" Far distant yet is the Earth's cyclic end
Or the decline of its productive power.
And men live in the race as it lives on,
One generation in another's life,
The mighty dead, too, living in their deeds.
Ay, this is immortality,—lived well,
Lived ill,—'t is written as ourselves have done,—
Record, eternal, ineffaceable.
Men die: worth, virtue, wisdom live. Our acts,
Our principles survive the doom of worlds.
Live not the venerable dead with us,
Teaching and ruling as their wont? Where is
The end of the dominion of the mind
Of Kapila? of Plato? and of him
Who gave the law to Israel? Of him
Whose geometric forms, or lines, or points,
Measure in every science, art, and trade?
Of those whose good example is the law,
The life and hope of all the human race?"

Then I to him: " Thus have the Comptists taught
And Jews of old, the memory no less
Of former generations fading out
As years increase. What but oblivion
Is end of personality?"

Then he,
Resuming, " So untimely fade the deeds

The Colloquy

Of men as they are held in memory
By their posterity or overlaid
And lost in legends; not so Nature keeps
The record and will keep for evermore.

Nothing is lost, and nothing really dies;
Nothing has been but has left of itself
Somewhere an inerascable account.
Each atom registers whatever is
And holds the history of all that was
And embryo of all that is to be.
Could we but question one of these or note
Its combinations, changes, accidents,
We might, as on a printed page, read all
Of past occurrences,—as well predict
What yet shall be in all futurity;
Of every force, the registry exact,
The motion and the weight of every star,
The height of every wave raised on the sea,
Rapidity of every wave of light
And tremors of the air producing sound;
Recording every cry and spoken word
And never uttered thoughts and sighs suppressed,
With every deed that men would keep concealed.”

I said, “ A deathsome record like the tomb;
Reminding us that when we come to die,
Not our own consciousness of what we did
Or were shall keep the Universe informed,
But our poor dust, or happily, some deed
Or incident become linked in the chain
Of causes and effects. It is not much,

Conversation XV

A saurian's bones or skull that Hamlet found
So cheaply valued when we are no more.
And quickly comes this end to all of us,
Or finished or unfinished is our work
Or any part of the provision made
For those left to our care."

He answered me,
" We know not at what moment Death will come,
But most have time to work, the time to learn,
The time for doing good. Myself will strive,
As he, my fellow-worker and true friend,
To make my little corner of the world
Somewhat less miserable than when I came,—
So live that Death may not be troublesome."

I said, " If, to this end each one would strive,
We soon should see an Earthly Paradise."

He answered: " An ideal I pursue,—
Not that the perfect I approach, nor boast
In pride of fancied good or worthiness!
I would but reach what others have attained,
I would be just and meek and merciful.
What gain for me to be like one of these!—
Like ancient Job, who ne'er the widow wronged,
Nor fatherless; like that good governor,
In old Nicopolis, who never took
A child from mother's breast nor the poor man
From his wife's side; like him who took the care
To say to all, before he came to die,
That if he had judged one unrighteously,

The Colloquy

Or one oppressed, or owed to one a debt,
He ready stood to make them full amend."

Moved deeply by his high resolve, I said,
" Almost thou dost persuade me to content
Myself in going out my little round,
To toil as is my lot or help in need,
Nor mind what Fate or Chance or Providence
Brings forth of evil or of good. Yet there
Is that—I know not what, or if it is—
To which I would appeal; idolator
I may be, blindly shaping me a god,
Or think I lose me in a godless waste."

Then he to me: " It is no easy thing,
To put all superstition under us,
Distrusting where we see—in the unseen,
In the unknown, bestowing confidence.

There is no waste where all of space is full.
No lacking of prevision, force, and law
Where every atom holds the energy
Latent that may evolve a universe,
The consciousness and the morality
Sufficient for developing the life
Of any world,—imparting intellect
And moral sentiment to higher forms,—
All capabilities in learning, art,
Forms of society, and government."

I asked, " Do wisdom, justice, truth, and right
Inhere in substances ? in energies ?
Or naming Nature as creating all,

Conversation XV

Providing all and judging in the Earth,
Wouldst thou invest her with the attributes,
By long consent, ascribed to Deity;
His omnipresence and omnipotence,
Or providence as seen in history ?”

He answered: “ Nature comprehends the whole,
Is the World-orderer, World-governor.
Not that this covers up all argument
Or fathoms the unknown. We feebly see
The universal plan in such small part
As now our vision grasps. Nor may a name,
Though reverently spoken, furnish us
With the solution of these mysteries
That but recede as we investigate.”

I said, “ And yet to that Inscrutable,
Unknowable, Philosophy has turned
To find the cause of all.”

Then he to me:

“ The cause of all is immanent in all,
Whate’er the cause may be—to us unknown,—
As in dynamics proven: everything
That has existence—atom, world, all space,
Abounds with its own vital energies;
Or every atom has its sentient side,
Or Nature as a whole is seen endowed
With spontaneity, susceptible
Of use, each part in force or form or life,
Or found as readily transmutable;
The Universe, as Haeckel has declared,

The Colloquy

A unit in its cause and mechanism,
Self-ordered, self-evolved, and self-sustained;
Substance and mind a single principle,
And found phenomenal the difference
Between a mental fact and physical.
And seen the human conscience, built up out
Of slowly organized experiences
Of pleasure or of pain, nor needing once
Other than natural guidance in the course
Of the development hereto attained."

" Losing," I said, " the personality,
Intelligence, and Fatherhood of God."

" And losing it in sorrow," he replied:
" To see the Sun shine from the silent heaven,
And Moon and stars, down on a soulless world!
And I have felt with utter loneliness
The absence of the Great Companion dead.
Yet terrible, as is the thought of it,
For without God the Natural Universe
Has lost to me its soul of loveliness,
No less the great command to man I keep—
To work as best I can while it is day,
For the night cometh when no man can work."

CONVERSATION XVI

OF REMINISCENCE

I

THE Savant ending his discourse, the Seer
A second time took my inquiries up.
Remembering his promise, first he said,
“Thou searchest ever and dost not despair,
And light will come to thee at last and peace.
But long will be thy strife, and wearisome
Thy watch, ere thou shalt overcome and gain
The full enlightenment. Then will the world
Of sense be brought to end; thyself become
Pure, passionless; desire forever still,
All sin subdued.

And know, thou wast before
The world had form, coeval with its life:—
Given to nurture of the elements;
Humbled with creeping things in mire and dust,
With birds nesting on boughs, with beasts in caves;
The earth imprisoning thy soul the while
Fashioned by animal progenitors
And upright raised for thee,—for man; and now,
To sense inclined or wisely making choice,
Determinest as never star or Fate,
Or ever any god, thy destiny.

The Colloquy

II

This of the Universe I would relate :
It is not more—it never will be less ;
Life does not add to it—death naught substracts,
Its forms of matter and its energies
Being forever redistributed.
Nothing is made—change brings what is about ;
What lives, has lived before—will live again.
Repeatedly Earth's life has been reborn,
The former generations living now,—
Our farthest ancestry yet in the world
And sharing daily our companionship.
Thus unto all is portioned equally,
Time, happiness, wealth, honor, fame, and power.
To none the Universe shows favoritism :
No one it wrongs or slights ; to each it gives
Sometime, somewhere, all opportunities.
One is a king enthroned—one is a slave ;
The slave will be a king, the king, a slave ;
The lewd, the leprous wretches sometime take
Virtue's fair garb and mead of happiness ;
The galley convict, helpless of reprieve
And miserable unspeakably to death,
Sometime have liberty and reverence ;
The proud, deceitful, selfish one the while
Sinking his life to very brutishness,
Whereto he will be born in other world.
No soul but passes through the painful round
Of all experiences to perfect it :—
Each one reborn on Earth, until desire
Is last subdued, then never after seeks
The realm of sense and is not born again.

Conversation XVII

Such soul the sensual never more will tempt,
Nor pleasure turn aside, nor vanity,
Nor death again have power over it.

And rational throughout the moral plan
And universal,—partial to no one
Mercy or grace, or judgment, chastisement;
Never propitiation made for some
That others are denied of,—have not known;
Atoning sacrifice not made by one
Alone and once for all, but made by all
Sometime, somehow, in service to the race;
Bearing the sorrow all, experiencing
The pain; and tempted all, all sharing sin,
All overcoming—perfected at last,
Joined all in the same immortality.

III

To the Materialist these mysteries
Remain: how life first from the lifeless came,
And life to consciousness, and consciousness
To moral sense. Nor has it yet been shown
What keeps our personal identity
Amid the change and flight of molecules.
Existence, one has said, *is not composed*
For two consecutive moments of time
Of the same particles, yet all the while
The life continues on, and memory
Treasures its vast, accumulated stores;—
Including what diameters of vision!
What fantasies! what thoughts! experiences!
Event upon event, though not as one

The Colloquy

Presumes, in common with photography:
Not as a palimpsest its entries took,
Not as the speeding atoms impress take,—
As quickly give to others with increase,
And not as Carus teaches,—set in forms,
But recollection found a faculty
Of an eternally persistent mind.
Hidden, how long these stores at times, as when
The aged recall what happened them in youth!
Hidden at times how wondrously through years,
As when disease obscures or injury
Closes the portals of the intellect;
Then shown with health's repair as at the first!
In accident how inconceivably
Quick to appear! when all that has occurred
To one in life, or all that he has done,
Passes in instantaneous review!

Nor may our moral freedom be explained
By a material philosophy,
Nor those inquiries which discovery
And deepest learning never satisfy;
Which set at rest by theory or creed
A little while, still other riddles find,—
Abysmal deeps of personality,—
Of self, of others' souls, not fathomed yet,
Of sentient Nature, never yet explored;
Or having limits found, these limits break
Till further boundaries are set and moved,—
Horizons that recede and still recede,
And beckon on to the infinitudes,
Unrealized, and far eternities.

Conversation XVI

Even the animal intelligence,
So highly lauded in a late discourse,
How little understood! the wondrous sense
Of sight, of smell, with those expressions seen,
Of deepest spiritual significance
And moods incomprehensible to us.
As much as man, the dog has shown his fear
Of the unusual, and his intercourse
With forms of being by ourselves unseen.
Sees phantoms, it is thought, may it not be
Thin astral forms as sometimes seen by man?
Or disembodied spirits of the dead?
And what occultism, supernaturalism,
Leads the guanacos to their dying place?
Where, from the social herds on open plains,
Barren plateaus, and from the mountain sides
Of Patagonia, the aged ones,
And sick and wounded ones, descend alone,
To the thorn thickets on the Santa Cruz
And Gallegos, nor once miscalculate
The time, nor miss the way, though hitherto
Untrod save by those never to return;—
Dragging their feeble bodies, creeping far
Under the bush, to deepest solitudes,
There singly suffering the pangs of death;
Continuing this awful pilgrimage
From the immeasurable past till now.
And why begun? By what far ancestor?
And how, untaught, so sacredly observed,
Since to those banks none are accompanied?
A thousand generations lying there
In those funereal vales, in sepulture

The Colloquy

Communal as our own, and solemn more,
And mournful, than are human tragedies.

And yet remain these problems of descent :
The varied types of men and faculties,
With those exceptionable qualities
Attributed to genius. Human life,
From very first, has been a series
Of strange surprises, little calculable
By any law, so variable the way,
Either of retrogression or advance,
As not by subtlest of philosophers
Discerned. Has one done well or ill, the cause
Is sought in circumstance of birth, of clime,
Of age,—of kind or hard environment.
Yet those with circumstance, apparently
Most favorable, and opportunity,
End with a brief and ignoble career.
The titled houses, wealthy, honorable,
Send forth their idle, sensual prodigals,
And culture the most generous and wise
Misses, how oft! the moral faculties;
While men of humble origin, through some
Impulse or gift, we know not how acquired,
Rise up to be the leaders of the race,—
Teachers and benefactors of our kind.
Out of the saddest and most hopeless depths
Of social misery and poverty
Came one, the loveliest I ever knew,—
Most charitable, sweet, and pure in life.
Heredity, as said the Eremite,
Does not account for genius or its lack,

Conversation XVI

Nor for the birth of those remarkable
In history,—for Moses, Gautama,
Jesus, Mohammed, Luther, Shakespeare, Burns,
Heyne, Cervantes, Lincoln, Joan of Arc,
Or other name secure in memory;—
Foundlings or like the oftenest the men
Of genius, as was ancient Salem's king,
Fatherless, motherless, without descent.
Is it not that the wisest bring with them,
The vast experiences of former lives ?
And favored ones, who in the race of life
Fail signally, is it not that they bear
The weight of tendency bequeathed to them
By former acts ?—themselves expressing now
The ends to which they lived and gave their
thoughts ?

Not only once, as the Apostle saith,
Is it appointed unto men to die.
Already often we have tasted death :
Our life here on the Earth is only one
Of a long series of lives, in which
Incarnated, our souls have lived. Most time
Men look to the immortal life beyond,
Not to the immortal life they left behind ;
Think of the death, which dying, leads to Heaven,
Not of the death they died to live on Earth,
Yet from the memory of former lives,
Is born our hope of living after death.

How came I into this world ? asked a child,
Surprised in its new home. As one in sleep

The Colloquy

Borne to another house, wakes up to ask
How he came there, so from the sleep of death
The child awoke, to ask how it had come
From once familiar scenes, to this strange world;
Or others, having lived on Earth before,
Find in the things familiar their surprise.

IV

Myself recall the people I have met
Long years ago, the streets and dwelling place
I knew in some old city of the East,
In ruin now. And often I recall
Adventure and employ in some strange land,
Unlike these eyes have seen, but no less real.
These fragmentary reminiscences
Of struggling consciousness, I have at times
Tried to collect in a chronology,
Fitting my present life thereto, or more
Or less distinctly. On a tongue of land
That jutted outward from the Arctic Pole
Then with a Tropic verdure clad, I lived—
Born to those fair of skin, that afterward
Migrated Southward till the Persian Gulf
And Indus set their bounds; impeded oft,
And long delayed by war with savage tribes,
Or slowly struggled with the glacial clime
Involving then the Northern Hemisphere,
But in their struggles gained; all conquering
And now as nations dominant, our own
And kindred languages still uttering
The words I lisped. I know not but the sleep

Conversation XVI

Of death, came over me. On Elam's plains
I was a shepherd, walking with my flocks;
At night, looked upward to the milliard orbs
Circling their ceaseless round or seeming fixed;
Observing, as they changed or disappeared,
Or when returned with the revolving year;
With tireless eyes, then searching outermost,
Depth beyond depth; discovering the moons
Of Jupiter; the fleecy nebulae
Resolving into stars; and thought to count
The cycles of lunation for the round
Of eighteen solar years, whereby I learned
To calculate with certainty the time
Of the eclipses of the Sun and Moon,
Or past, or yet to come. Again I died,
Nor e'er returned to my nomadic life,
Or those clear skies. Reborn,—to Akkad now,
And dwelling on the fertile strip of land,
The Tigris and Euphrates bound; before
Elam had come as conqueror, or yet
In Ur the Hebrew patriarch was born.
The hours I numbered then that fill the day,—
The days that make a week, a month, a year;
Twelve months, the year, and thirty days, the
month,
With added days to fill the calendar;
And seven days the week; the seventh day,
Sabbath I named, or sacred day of rest.
Moreover I arranged and mapped anew
The constellations of the Zodiac;
For then the Vernal equinox occurred
When Aries was rising with the sun.

The Colloquy

Again I died. Reborn in Chaldea,
I was a priest to Bel in Babylon,
Wearing the sacred robe and clad the more
In mystery. My watch at night recalled
To memory, none was more learned among
Astronomers, none held as I was then
In reverence and awe by the great king,
And that vast city's busy populace.
No empty fame: for I made measurements
Of the apparent motions of the stars
And computations of their distances.
O had that mighty people rightly prized
And kept the knowledge I bequeathed to them!
For boldly I urged these hypotheses,
By countless observations since confirmed:—
The meteoric origin of all
The worlds and incandescence of the suns
Which shine in space,—that stars, which seem to us
But points of light distributed through heaven,
Are globes of inconceivable extent:—
That all the worlds, now habitable, once
Were nebulous, or gaseous, diffuse,
As flame since cooled, compressed, solidified,
And fitted to accommodate their life;—
That all of space, to us immensity
Illimitable, is the fold of stars,
As numberless as locusts in the swarm—
Suns, planets, systems, constellations, which
By mutual attraction are upheld,
Or keep their orbits changless with the years,—
Infinity of solar systems like
Our own and penetrated, every one,

Conversation ƷVII

With life and consciousness and memory.
But superstitious all and slow to learn,
They worshiped the bright stars as gods, feared
them

As dæmons, or they thought by them to read
Fortune and destiny. Astrology
Supplanted the new science, deadening
And monstrous conjuries and sorceries;—
Forgotten all my great discoveries,
Until long centuries had passed. Reborn
In Greece, with new access of light, in Rome,
In India where I made known the fact
Of the rotation of the Earth,—not that
Myself recalled each time I reappeared
The knowledge I had previously attained,
But sometimes gave with lessened memory,
With increase, though, the oftener. Reborn
Long after in a Moorish town and held
A Saracenic caliph's patronage;—
Then at Senaar I made the measurement
Of a degree of latitude, therefrom
To calculate the Earth's circumference,
Nor much its distance missed. Reborn again
In Italy, and helped with later art
And mightiest inventions to achieve,
I published, with the laws the stars obey,
A plan of the celestial mechanism.
'T was there a hellish hierarchy rose
To persecute and to repress the truth,
Chaining those who would give to men the light
In dungeons dark, or burned them at the stake,
Or tortured horribly till death relieved.

The Colloquy

But one recanted,—wise enough to save
His life to Science, wretched though in thought
Of cowardly escape from martyrdom,
For it was bitterness that death has not.
My latest coming thou full well dost know,
And knowest what I yet anticipate
Gaining and giving on my endless round.”

CONVERSATION XVII

OF PROVIDENCE

I

IN presence of the reverend men and wise
Assembled at the Chapel in retreat,
A specialist of some philosophy,
Some science or profession every one,
I should have bowed in silence, listening,
But since the problems and the discontent
Of all the ages burdened me, I asked
Of those I met that answer might be given
If answerable: so, when the august Seer
And affable had ended his discourse,
Others I importuned, if happily,
They might have light myself had not attained,—
For those deep themes profounder argument.
Responding to my urgent call one rose,
A teacher, patient, tolerant of view,
Of cheerful mood, most hopeful of the world,
Who found in all a purpose manifest
And great reality of Providence,
In moral discipline of man the way
To purity and endless life with God.

He said to me, beginning his discourse,

The Colloquy

“ Thou hast considered the intention shown
In Nature as a guiding principle
And knowest well what refuge Faith has found
And Piety, in Teleology ;
For Moses, Zoroaster, Hesiod, Job,
Anaxagoras, Zeno, Sokrates,
Perceiving the proportions which exist
In Nature as of causes and effects,
Inferred a Ruling Power and Providence ;
Or Newton, Kepler, and Copernicus,
Through observation, study most profound,
Pronounced the structure of the Universe,
The simplest of arrangements that could be ;
So represented that the only world
We know, or can conceive as possible,
Is one where Order, Law, and Reason reign.

God ruling all,—this ages have proclaimed.
God keeping all,—this is the sum of faith.
Though Hebrew and Chaldean seers presumed
Too much and writers of the Church since then,
When they declared, that out of nothing God
In the beginning made the Heaven and Earth
And all in them,—ourselves, out of the ground
Created very last ; for we are not
Any such handiwork ;—the Universe
Not an anthropomorphic mechanism,
Nor brought forth by some cataclysmic bursts
Of energy, nor by apocalypse
As suddenly of the material worlds
And their whole life through a divine decree,
But brought forth by causations numberless

Conversation XVIII

And infinitely serial and prolonged.
To show intelligent design and end,
We need not necessarily assume
That anything was wrought by miracle,
Much less that aught was out of nothing made;
Nor take the burden on us to account
For one or more direct creative acts
In space by an external agency,
As if by hand one had built up the worlds
Or worked as an external architect,
On special and on local organisms.
Nor is there need to limit or degrade
Discourse on Immanent Finality,
By holding that man is the end of all
And that whatever has become exists
Exclusively for his own benefit,
Since Providence permits what he has held
As evil and disastrous in extreme,
And even has the full provision made
In Nature for his deadliest enemies.
Man is a sharer in the Universe
Of God's unlimited beneficence,
With myriad other creatures that have life;
Who, in the Universe, is only one
Of that infinity of things which were
Before he was and had the need of them,
And that infinity of things which still
Exists but serves no human purposes,
And which to claim as ours is robbery.

This, though, we may assume in argument:
Whatever is, is by Intelligence,

The Colloquy

Revealing in becoming processes
Analogous to our own reasoning—
As our ideals shape in mechanism,
Since Nature's evolutions correspond
So very nearly with man's industry;
Our functions, instincts, industries alike,
A chain of means adapted to an end.
As fully this assume:—that Providence
Has wisely portioned out to everything
Means to the end for which it came to be;
Or elements have held from very first
Essence and quality determinate
The most precise; the habitable worlds
And all of their innumerable life
A pre-existence in ideal form;—
Directive, formative the Universe,
Anticipating what itself becomes.
This, too, we may assume:—that everything,
Serving its special ends or its own need
Supplies, serves somewhat every other kind;
As when the animals at burrowing,
And worms and insects, boring, turn the soil
And pulverize it, suiting their own use,
So greatly aid the human husbandman;
Or bees and wasps, when gathering their food,
The flowers fertilize and so provide
For other insects, birds and beasts and man,
The nourishing and palatable fruit;
Or Nature's various agencies combine
In a rude sympathy and sacrifice,
Whereby each one, pursuing its own aims,
Confers something of benefit on all.

Conversation XVIII

II

In Nature there is seen a providence,
Fitting the world for its abundant life.
And manifest the immanence of God
In all phenomena,—in living forms;
And the procession of the Spirit seen
Through evolution of the moral world,
In the long line of physical descent,—
In what has elevated or refined,
Or war, or worship, law or government,
Art, music, oratory, poetry,
Or the perception of the beautiful;
Determining before descent began,
Uplifting, guiding still and perfecting.

In human history, how clearly seen
The immanence of God and providence!
Not seen alone among a chosen few
In highly favored lands and prosperous,
But seen in want and sorrow oftener,—
Man's forced migrations over land and sea,
His conflicts, toil, privation, sacrifice.
The sufferings of which we make complaint,
And hardships borne, how wondrously repaid
In moral excellence and fortitude!
Our limitations, seeming weaknesses
How rich in resources! in aptitudes!
For how advantageous the period
Of infancy, as gradually prolonged
In us through years, when with it we compare
The quick maturity of animals!

The Colloquy

The helplessness of childhood strengthening
Or making permanent the family,
And yielding, too, that mental pliancy
For teachableness and submissiveness
To discipline. And profit now to us
The hardships and privations undergone
By our progenitors in savagery,
In barbarism, through which there were evolved
The habits of coöperating groups,—
The family, the gens, the tribal league
And nationality, establishing
The institutions of society.

What gain to us the servitude that gave
The fixed industrial habits to our race!
And gain the despotisms, authorities,
Which have made man submissive to restraint.
To Brahmanism and to the Papacy,
Corrupt, oppressive, and idolatrous,
The last, well meriting the epithet
Opprobrious of the Apocalypse,
The Scarlet Woman, what the debt we owe!
What vast experiences of inner life
And deep philosophy the East has given!
While, through the tireless efforts of the Church,
The warring nations of a continent
Were into close confederacy brought,
Prophetic of still wider fellowship,—
A universal confraternity.
E'en to the hardest of environments
And hostile elements we owe advance:
What precious energies our Northern clime,

Conversation XVIII

Or Winter's blasts and ice bestow on us!
To most destructive agents, too, we owe
Advancement in enlightenment and peace:
Through the discovery of fulminates,
And making firearms, man has gained control
Over the brutish forces of the world,
And great, in common worth, their use has proved!
Equipping equally the artless boor
With feudal baron and the armored knight,
The weakest, equally with strongest ones.
And war, to what brief periods now brought
By rifled cannon and the needle gun!
Even the wickedest of men are made
The instruments of good: the conqueror,
Not thinking of the right, has put down wrong;
While tragedies of sin and suffering
Have heralded reform and higher life.

And seen in violence and cruelty,
Ofttimes, the testing of pure principles,
Or rudest, harshest methods educate
And ultimately quicken and refine.
As the wild mother teaches her young brood,
The way of self-dependence, self-defense,
Quite weaning them of love and driving forth,
As fugitives from the maternal nest,
So have the generations of mankind
Passed under tutelage;—their lessons learned,
To persevere and last to overcome.
And doubtless Heaven has purposes concealed,
Exceeding wise, where we have only seen
The path of evil and calamity,

The Colloquy

Or wrongs and sorrows, that have been the lot
Of Earth's heroic ones, her noble, pure :—
The godlike suffering, the Muse relates,
And labors of Prometheus, Herakles,
Of Theseus, Jason, Samson, Œdipos,
With those of every age who much endured,—
Io, Hesione, Andromeda,
Iphigenia and Antigone ;
The chaste Lucretia and Virginius
And St. Perpetua, Felicitas ;
Isaiah, Epictetus, Cicero ;
The metropolitan St. Chrysostom,
Dante, Cervantes, Bruno, Chatterton,
Columbus, Malespina, Wallenstein,
Magellan, Joan of Arc, Toussaint L'Ouverture,
Wat Tyler, Raleigh, Bunyan, Priestly, Paine,
William of Orange, John of Barneveld,
And company of saints and patriots,
Brought to untimely death through martyrdom,
In exile wasted and imprisonment.

While every people truthfully may claim
Some special providence attending them,
Little can we approve the selfishness
Claiming some tribal-god or savior sent,
Helpful alone to them, to other ones
Hateful, malignant, and calamitous.
Yet manifest the prescience that gave
Teachers and legislators in the time
Most opportune, as when in Greece appeared
Kadmos with the Phœnician alphabet,
And Solon and Lykurgos giving laws.

Conversation XVIII

And manifest the providence that moved
The Hebrew prophet to redeem his race
And kept watch always over Israel;
Divine intention manifest that made
The patriotic Greeks the instruments,
In war, to save the European states
From scourge of Oriental despotisms;—
That gave the free deserved supremacy
Over the slavish hordes and brutish might;
For moral forces and intelligence
Then gained a victory, advantageous
To Liberty unto the farthest time:—
Freedom, the gift that Greece bequeathed to us,
With every art and culture to refine.
And seen prevision, providence, that chose
Rome to give law and order to the world,
And last, when Rome ruled only to oppress
And enervate, moved the Germanic tribes,
With energies invincible to gain
For subject races rightful sovereignty.
Since seen divine intention manifest
In wakening the masses to demand
Enfranchisement and right in property,
Disowning despotisms, too long usurped;
That gave to England a Free Parliament
And Habeas Corpus act, to France the code
Napoleon; to Russia foresight gave
For widest empire and prosperity,
Leading her greatest czar abroad to seek
Apprenticeship among ship-carpenters;
Her navy planning and her merchantmen,
As war or commerce needs; brought from the Fens

The Colloquy

The Puritan to chasten England's kings,
And gave him wisdom, power, victory,
The while he ruled but for his country's good;
That made Napoleon and his command
The scourge of Europe's effete monarchies,—
Giants in modern warfare whom, not men,
But elements in contest overthrew;
Whom snows of Russian steppes and icy moors
Of Beresina warred against, hot sun
And desert sand and Alp and Appenine.

And clearly manifest the providence
That brought to the New World those colonists,
Composite Aryan, or Teutonic mixed
And Celtic—now a common family;
Detained the Puritan and Mennonite,
Pilgrim and Quaker in the Netherlands,
Acquainting them with the free public schools,
The secret written ballot, a free press,
Supremacy of the judiciary
And right of counsel in defence, withal
The ancient Anglo-Saxon liberty;
So furnished with experiences in right,
That Freedom never need have lack with them.
Or had they still a narrow tolerance,
If not by Pilgrim shown, by Puritan,—
The liberty of conscience for themselves,
For other faiths a sore discountenance;
Or would they found a fixed theocracy,
Doubt and inquiry soon came to revenge
The slight to reason, for God overruled
So that they builded better than they knew,—

Conversation XVIII

Laid the foundations that our states maintain,
The freest, noblest of democracies.

How manifest the providence, that gave
The Revolutionary patriots
Determination and persistency,
The stanchest heroism, enthusiasm!—
Wisdom to Franklin,—courage and resolve
To Adams, Putnam, Schuyler, Marion, Jay,—
Gave fire to Henry's speech and script of Paine,—
Resource to Hamilton,—to Jefferson,
Faith in the capabilities of men.
Gave dignity of mien to Washington,
And brought him up to be, of all great men,
The most successful and most fortunate,
The first to discipline a soldiery
In these three fundamental principles:—
In patience for delay of victory,
In courage for disaster and defeat,
In self-restraint, that when their arms had won,
Law had security, and Liberty.
One whom no human greatness parallels:
Not of a royal line, but raised to rule
Through moral majesty and dignity,—
In his integrity pre-eminent,
Unselfish and without the lust for power,
Magnanimous in peace as brave in war,—
Example apt for all Republicans
And rulers of mankind through coming time.
What spectacle, in all the ages gone,
Is more sublime than when our president,
Invested with imperial command,

The Colloquy

Yields back the trust—lays its proud honors down
And turns him home, the quiet citizen ?

In later times, when slavery encroached
Upon our liberties and those in chains
Cried seemingly in vain, how manifest
Eternal Justice, All-wise Providence!
Not choosing the great parties of the land,
Or Whig, or Democrat, in rivalry,
But kindly Birney, as the instrument
In politics, to reaffirm the right
And to defend; nor agitator called
Out of the churches,—silent, most of them
Through fear, or bribed with gold, with patronage,
To countenance the wrong, but Garrison,
The Radical, who, risking all, denounced
Our Constitution as a covenant
With Hell the while it sanctioned property
In men, their sale and robbing of their toil.
Though worthy all of their compatriots,—
Phillips, the eloquent, calm Emerson,
And Thoreau, Concord's dreaming Eremite;
The sainted Channing, at the risk of place,
Pleading the liberty of every soul,
And Parker, man's inalienable right;
With precious earnest names that England gave,—
Macaulay, Clarkson, Sharpe, and Wilberforce.
And these as well deserving memory :—
Doak, Adams, Phelps, iconoclastic Paine;
Coxe, Rankin, Tyson, Embree, Raymond, Weld,
Nye, Tappan, Lundy, Palfrey, Frothingham;
Bold Garrett, philanthropic Fanny Wright.

Conversation XVIII

Jay, Bacon, Hale, lamented Burlingame;
Slade, Bacon, Bowditch, Greene, the sisters Grimke;
Chase, Seward, Greeley, Harriet Beecher Stowe;
Fremont, May, Wilson, Julian, Stevens, Howe;
Thome, Andrews, Higginson, and Horace Mann,
With noble company at Oberlin;
Free-thinking Gerrit Smith, Wright, Pillsbury;
Shipley, whose goodness Whittier has told;
Bronzed Corwin; Chapin with the flaming tongue;
Inimitable Beecher, loved Starr King;
Untiring Giddings; bluff, impulsive Wade;
The colored Douglass pleading for his race;
Immortal Sumner; Lovejoy, worthiest
Of men, who fell, shot by the savage mob,
And died, as heroes and as martyrs die,
For Liberty and for opinion's sake;
Our poets, taking up the slave's lament,
And he, like the old tribal prophet, rude,
Fanatical, whose apparition went
Marching along with the avenging hosts,
His name resounding in triumphal song.

And seen the providence that raised up men
To guide the Union through the Civil War,—
Sought after Lincoln in the Western wild,
As once the prophet sought in Israel,
The shepherd's son, him to annoint as king.
Less comely now the choice, not less the man,
In kingly bearing, such his native strength
And stature gained; the child of humblest birth
And very fewest opportunities,
Yet for such seeking, choosing, furnished more

The Colloquy

Than honored lineage and wealth bestow,—
Given the nerve of Herakles, the wit
Of wise Odysseus and of Sokrates,
Thought of Aurelius; the modesty
To bear him meekly with the weight of power:—
Unequaled in his gift of common sense
And insight in the human character,
Yet to all men the most considerate,
Most kindly, generous, and pitying;
And few have won so well immortal fame,
The glory—the respect of all the Earth.

And seen like providence in other lands,
In liberating men, enlightening,
Or sending them relief as they had need,—
Raised Garibaldi up in Italy,
And Bolivar, in South America,—
Hidalgo and the Indian patriot,
Juarez, to deliver Mexico.

And manifest in culture, in our speech,
The guidance of an all-wise providence.
How wonderful is language! what its use!
What witness of the word that was with God
In the beginning ere the worlds had form,
Or we had come to be to say, *I am* !
And clearly seen in all that has refined:—
In piety of man that bade him seek
The harmonies,—the beautiful in art,
In architecture, sculpture, poetry,
Music, and eloquence,—in life, the pure,
The just, the true, the right, the valorous;

Conversation XVIII

Seen in the wisdom of those ancient seers,
Who taught in Egypt, Persia, Palestine,
Assyria, China, India, Greece; seen in
The Saxon Reformation of the Church
And in the radical reforms proposed
By the Encyclopedists—protestants,
Iconoclasts, and disillusionists,
Who warred against assumed authority;
Of late, in gain of reason, tolerance,
Through wider education of mankind,
Through growth of Rational Philosophy,
Through influence of Free Religionists
And demonstrable scientific truth.

Ourselves and all our gain, what witnesses
To the great providence that makes us heirs,
In line of heritage, to those who gave
Disinterested service to mankind!—
The mighty dead, heroes, and patriots,
Sages, reformers, teachers, forerunners,
Discoverers, inventors, laborers,
Founders of states, lawgivers, men of faith,
Thinkers, investigators, questioners,
As many as have honorable fame,
And lives of sweetest piety and worth
With company of the immortal bards.”—

Reminded by this mention of a debt
Myself was owing, I here took the risk
Of incivility to interrupt
So grand an argument. “Permit,” I said,
“My tribute to the noble company

The Colloquy

On whom so much I leaned,—the most on him,
That old Ionian minstrel, whose proud song
Of great Achilles and much suffering,
Much traveling Odysseus wearies not;
Leaned on the Grecian dramatists who knew
The woes that came to Œdipos, to house
Of Agamemnon; of the curse the gods
Pronounced—the brand stamped inerasable
On the adulteress and murderess.
In spotless white robed these, the saintliest,
Alkestis and Antigone; or told,
How to the rock Prometheus had been chained,
His naked form bruised on the piercing flints,
While carrion vultures ate his living flesh,
Who, helping man, incurred the wrath of Jove.
Leaned on the Mantuan—of smoothest verse,
And on the exiled Florentine; and leaned
On these not less, the glory of our tongue,—
Shakespeare creating his ideal race
And Milton chanting with the Seraphim.
How much on these, the Muse's younger care!—
Walking with Wordsworth in the woodland wilds,
With Tennyson to hear the singing birds,
The babbling brooks and music of the waves;
Sometime, in company with native bards,
Now wearying with age, or those who late
Closed on the Earth their notes harmonious.
If my own memory should follow down,
Echo of olden bards in the New World,
What joy would be the thought, to share in meed
Of his sweet fame, my countryman, who sung
Of Hiawatha and Evangeline!

Conversation XVIII

This mention, too, I owe a moralist,
Epaphradotus' slave, who ne'er forgot
The rule of piety and cheerfulness,—
Tortured and maimed in body, exiled, sold,
An Irus in his poverty yet rich
In that he to the Spirit lived; of Heaven
Favored the more and to immortals dear.
With him, the Thrakian prophet-bard who taught,
That whatsoever is, is born of Love,—
Imperial Love that would not live alone
Prisoned in the Abyss, and out of it
Went forth to universal sovereignty,
Holding in undisputed sway alike
The elements and souls of men,—the life
Of all that lives and force of all that moves.”

Again resuming his discourse, he said,
“ And seen in the whole history of man,
Prevision, guidance, helping providence,
Alike in what the Physicist presumes
The course of natural development,
The Fatalist and the Materialist,
Dynamical necessity alone,
The Theologian, a decree of God.
Seen in the varied stores, contributed
By men in every age, of every clime,—
In the imperishable monuments
Of human skill, what labor, learning, faith,
And genius have immortalized; seen in
The proud achievements and discoveries
Rewarding modern enterprise, and seen
In the accumulated wealth of Earth,

The Colloquy

In architecture, arms, and implements
Of husbandry,—in decorative art,
In dress, in furniture, and cookery ;
The measurement of what the race has won
Through mental evolution, moral growth,—
Mankind's magnificent maturity,
Weighed with the artlessness of the first pair.
For so it pleased the Infinite to plan
The method of our life, in slowest growth
Up through interminable lower forms,
And the slow discipline of struggle since,
In often baffled ignorance, in want,—
In suffering untold, and sacrifice.

III

Not in design,—not in causality
Alone, is seen the Providence of God,
But often seen, as he reveals himself
In ethical relation with mankind,
Or gleaming through the thoughts, the characters,
The work of noblest personalities.
It is in the unwritten law of right
And wrong, implanted in the minds of men,
In those ideals of the pure and good
Held by the human race collectively.
It is in the persistence of the saint,
In self-denial of the moralist,
In the discoverer's enthusiasm,
The altruist's disinterestedness.
Or it is in the eccentricity
Of genius, in ambition's lofty aim.

Conversation XVIII

It is in modesty, in shame, remorse,—
Is in the redness of the maiden's cheeks,
Is in the flame that fires the heroes' eyes,
Is in the coward's fear, the sinner's guilt,
In evil destiny that follows crime;
Is that, which to ourselves returns the wrongs
We do to others,—that which makes, at last,
Our very selfishness serve other men.
It is in seeking what we have not seen.
It is in loving what we have not known.
It is in reminiscence of the past,
In the prevision of the things to come;
Is in the purpose of the noblest men,
Their ceaseless labor to convince their kind
Of sin, of righteousness, of just awards;
Is in the innate consciousness we have
Of infinite and of eternity;
Is in the oldest, widest of beliefs,—
That memory, responsibility,
And hope extend into a future world.
It is in what so moves the sensitive
And the imaginative soul, that looks
Outward upon the wondrous spectacle
Which Nature ever offers to our view.
It is what makes all things strive to ascend,
And, in ascent, forever have beyond
A higher excellence to be attained.

See, in the course that Retribution takes,
The order of Omniscient Providence.
It cannot be by Chance or Fate, that sin
Has in itself its certain punishment,

The Colloquy

And that no wrong in history escapes
Deservéd penalty, though long delayed;
Nor yet by Chance, that Nature punishes
Thus signally infractions of her laws;
Never by Chance, that righteousness secures
To us a constantly increasing joy,
And sin so soon its loathing and disgust;
Nor that repentance for the wrongs we do
Is always met by a redemptive force.

Even the sin itself shall give account,
And this not wholly one of loss to men:—
For choosing good, or choosing ill in time,
Each one accomplishes his destiny;
The criminal and most immoral man,
As is the holiest saint, the richer made
Through exercise of personality.
Unwisely choosing, we deceive ourselves,
Yet are the richer through experience;
And, as God judges us, no one in vain
Has made his choice but for a purpose lives.

In error those who teach, that one through sin
May fall to depths that Mercy cannot reach,
Or from whose woe appeal is never heard.
The most degraded, sinful, wickedest,
Has yet such treasure, virtue in his soul,
That Heaven seeks it as for a jewel lost.
As Augustine has said, *No human heart
Is quite a sanctuary, and not one,
Polluted as a sewer and corrupt.*
We may not judge as Egypt's priests presumed,

Conversation XVIII

And Greeks, who stationed in the Underworld
The judges Hades and Persephone,
And Minos, Radamanthys, Æakos,
To separate the race in final doom;
For pardon, still, the chief of sinners finds,
As in the *Ædipos Koloneus* shown.

Trust me, the moral state of none is fixed,
Unchangeably at death, in Hell or Heaven,
Perpetuating torment endlessly,
And bliss, as endless and monotonous,
Since those in Paradise long none the less
For purity and wisdom unattained,
Than we, still burdened with our Earthly ills.
Probation is not limited to Time,
Or by locality; nor our free will,
Restricted to a brief and endless choice,
But all, by their experience profiting,
Will sometime tire of sin's illusiveness.
Even the saintliest elect so mark
The way of moral gain and blessedness:
Through sin's bond-service and its sorrow brought,
Through duty owned and world of sense subdued,—
All, to the infinitely perfect One,
Their ever-upward journey traveling.

And this, the sweetest thought of man,—that God
Loves all and will save all, is found the best
Interpretation of humanity
Related to the scheme of Providence
And mystery of moral discipline.

The Colloquy

And surely what will happen finally
Will, on the whole, be just and rational.

In error those who teach that Christ will come,
In some far future day, to judge the world.
Quite other coming of the Lord I see,
Since not delayed until the end of Time;
Coming each day, each hour of life, at death,
To judge,—approving or condemning us.
The Son of Man, in other coming seen,
Than in the flaming clouds of Heaven enthroned;
Not rising upward from a damnéd world
Like Moloch; not, as fabled Noah once,—
When in the ark he took his family,
The seven only chosen of mankind,—
Two of each kind of beasts, fowls, creeping things,—
Leaving all life beside, none pitying,
Without to perish in the watery waste;
Not, in the spectacle the millions dread,
By superstition taught and kept in awe.
I see him as in Galilee he walked
Long years ago, still near to everyone,
In discipline of trial, toil, neglect;
Himself made perfect through his suffering,—
That righteous one assumed from among us,
Not made our judge, but an example given,
The perfect with unworthiness compared.
One, only, is our judge and one our law,
God immanent in all and exigent.

Conversation XVIII

IV

True, much is wanting yet in this discourse
To satisfy, but difficult the proof
Of what we know to certainty exists.
I know I am, yet fail in proving it;
I know God is, is the most certain truth
Of all, but fail in proving it because
The things, I bring to prop my argument,
Are less a certainty than God himself."

I said, " A God unseen by mortal eyes,
Unknown to us as personality;
Or manifest, how very rarely come!
At what long intervals in history!
Or dimly shown in human character."

He answered: " Often shining forth, as seen
By seers of every age and men of faith,
As many as have to the spirit lived.
And sometimes seen by us,—seen in the face
Of one who loves when gaining loved one's troth.
Seen when the mother first looks on her child,
Rejoicing in its life; seen as the child
Grows conscious of the mystery of life.
And sometimes visible to us in calm
And peace of soul, and in heroic deed,—
In time of victory, in services
Disinterestedly bestowed on men.
And awful, fearful, dreadful, sometimes seen,
And yet unutterably beautiful,
Impressive! we have seen it through our tears.

The Colloquy

We see it in the face of dying one ;
We note the absence of it in the dead.

O, what it must have been to see the face
Of Jesus when he taught the multitudes,
When preaching on the Mount, or when he said,
Suffer the little ones to come to me !
What view of the divine, could we have seen
The face of Zoroaster when he told
His vision of the triumph of the good
Over the evil, or as he disclosed
The incorruptibly pure principle !
Greatest of prophets ! nearest to the stars,—
Teacher of Persia, Israel, the world.
What vision of the spirit's victory—
The patient, lovely, beautiful, divine,
Could we have seen the face of Gautama
The hour he was enlightened,—when desire
Had gone, pure understanding having come ;
Exemption come from birth, from death—old age
And premature decay, securing then
Deservedly his apotheosis,
Though yet upon the Earth in mortal form !
Or could we have seen Moses when he stood
In Pharaoh's court pleading for Israel,
Or Sokrates, standing in ecstasy,
Or when in Athens making his defense.
What vision of the spirit dwelling in
And shining forth, lighting its fragile clay
If Epictetus we had seen converse
On Morals—vindicating Providence !
And had we seen the Grecian dramatists,

Conversation XVIII

Acting their solemn plays and tragedies,
And Homer when he sung his Iliad!
Or had we seen the sculptor Phidias,
When he unveiled Athena Parthenon,
Or when he finished the Olympian Zeus;
And glowing countenance of him who made
Apollo Belvidere when it was done,
And those three Rhodian artists, when they shaped
That serpent-knotted group, Laoköon,
And him at Milo when he had attained
The perfect in his art, a worshiper,
Silent in awe before his handiwork;
Or Raphael and Michael Angelo
When their proud works looked down to them from
dome
And nave,—from oldest, richest galleries
And courts allotting immortality;
Or Titian, Turner, Tintoret, inspired
With the unspeakable sublimities,
Expressed in varying phenomena;
Or Shakespeare when his Hamlet was complete;
Or great composers in their loftiest strains,
Beethoven, Handel, Hayden, Mozart, Bach;
Or Siddons walk in glory on the stage.
What visions of the Spirit, lightening
Yet Earthly glory and man's proudest deeds,
Must one have had to see Napoleon
After his victory at Austerlitz,—
Or Cromwell when dispersing Parliament,
Or Cæsar when he crossed the Rubicon,
Or Frederick when making his attack,
At Leuthen on the armies of Prince Karl,—

The Colloquy

Or Luther when his theses were affixed
To the old castle church at Wittenberg,
And when at Worms he stood alone before
Imperial majesties and hierarchs,
Invincible as those strong battlements
Eternal Justice raised in Heaven's defense!
Or had we seen Columbus at the prow
When in the far horizon land appeared,—
Or Jefferson when ready to submit
To waiting patriots and farthest time,
His draft of resolutions, that declared
The independence of America,—
Or Washington when taking his command,
When sinking to his rest secure in fame,
Or Lincoln when he spoke at Gettysburg."

I said to him, " These as the gods have wrought
And spoken. Are they as the gods or men
Living as personalities, or merged
In the one will ? "

He answered: " It pleased him
Who gave the life to all, that we should live
From him forever separate entities,
As in our moral freedom manifest;
For we may do what pleases him the most,
Or do the things which he the least approves.
Though, as I have observed, his love and grace
And goodly chastisements at last prevail
On all—redeeming all and perfecting."

" But evil still remains," I said, " the strife,—
The whole creation groaning, travailing

Conversation XVIII

In pain together, thus obedient
Apparently to kosmic law, but how
Excusable to helpless sufferers
And innocent, or ever justified
By the Great Consciousness and Love Divine,
E'en by its serving moral discipline ?
While clouds and shadows intervene and night
Of death is yet between us and the dawn
Of sinless worlds and immortality."

He answered, " These remain, but not without
A purpose visible, or, if not seen
In Time, have promise in Eternity.
The evil of the world is incident
To finite imperfection and free will ;
Or found to be the means to certain ends,—
As agency in moral discipline,
A metaphysical necessity ;
Or in acquirement is adaptive found,
As when the lower forms of life are made
To feed the higher, or as Death removes
One generation that another one
May keep in youth and health the organism."

I said, " Continuing the strife, the woe,
As Nature still asserts the selfishness
Seen in the natural ascent of life,
Nor brings to end Death's lamentable reign."

Then he, taking the argument, replied,
" Yet Earth, with all its evils, miseries,
Its strife, pain, woe, calamity, and death,

The Colloquy

Is justified in what we are, in what
Its awful discipline has brought to us.
But for the care, the trial, tempting sin,—
But for the weakness, misery around,
All virtues we had lacked and sense of right,—
Our courage, pity, patience, fortitude.
And never yet has anything of good
Or beautiful been born except of pain;
Nor is there aught worth our remembering,
Not costing suffering and sacrifice.
On every life some sore affliction falls
And some hard discipline to strengthen it,—
Earth's noblest ones afflicted to the end.
As one long bearing trouble says at last,
To perfect me and save me it was given.
As other one, enduring much, exclaims,
O wondrous ministry of sorrow! pain!
O wonderful provision of the cross!

The woes of man not less than glorious deeds
Have raised to Heaven his eloquence and song.
But needless, seemingly, the discipline
Of pain and trial, burdensome through life,
If death ends all that these have perfected.
It must be that our travel here is more
Than going through this round of toil and care,—
That this distressful Earthly pilgrimage
Has compensation other than the grave.
What can the meaning be of those restraints
Religion has imposed and moral law,
To which long generations have been born,
Unless it is preparing us to live

Conversation XVIII

Nearer perfection in another state ?
As one has written, though, *The sufferings*
Of life on Earth are not comparable
With the felicity to be revealed
To us and glory in the world to come.
As other one has said of chastisements,
We bear them first and after take the crown :
Thus our Great Educator foreordained
And Love Divine prepared the way to Heaven.

V

There is yet much remaining to be told
Of wrong and woe in human history ;
In war, in toil, in faith, in government,—
Our savagery, our inhumanity,
Since man, by his unreason, willfulness,
Impedes the nobler order manifest,
In Nature's unobstructed vehicle.
Yet I would plead the good and not despair,
Either of man or of High Heaven's design ;
Would, with the Roman sage, appeal to God,
Addressing him in the same confidence,
Thou wilt do well for me and for the world.

True, Providence moves slowly through the years
But surely moves : and certain the advance
Of Justice, Principle, and Liberty,
And weakening the while of brutish power.
And I have reasons many to believe
Each coming generation of our race
Will have a deeper sorrow for Earth's pain,—

The Colloquy

A livelier sympathy and tenderness.
And kindlier concern for all that lives.

Sometime, trust me, the strife, the pain will end,—
The veil be lifted up, and we behold
The meaning of this world of sin and wrong.

And something more I find to lift my hopes :
Our farthest ancestors began their life
On the first step of an ascending stair,
And we, ourselves, may make advance upon
What former generations have attained.
And here is weightier concern for us
Than in the awful problem of descent,—
It is in the great trust we hold for heirs
Soon to inherit our estate in life
And store of good and bad in character.
We owe to others, yet to come, a world
Less sinful, wrongful, vengeful, animal,
Than we have known ; or they should take the gain
We are now making on the past, themselves
Advance on it and give to farther heirs,
A heritage replete in every worth.

Not that all sin and sorrow here will end
And discipline of pain, or men e'er reach
Perfection here or immortality.
Scarcely need any one reflect to know
That we have no abiding city here,—
That all relations of humanity,
Our kindred and our goodly fellowships,
Are constantly dissolving as we go

Conversation XVIII

To the Eternal World. Dear, then, the thought,
That those who go and those yet here are one,
Whom Paul, writing to the Ephesians, named
The family of man in Heaven and Earth ;—
As Aryan fathers said in ritual,
They who within the sphere of Earth are stationed
Or who are settled now in realms of pleasure.

Are they not there as in the vision seen,—
The angels, Kherubim, and Seraphim?
And dwelling, seen beyond the starry spheres,
Risen, enfranchised, sainted, glorified
Our loved, by death divided from us here ? ”

I said to him, “ Could we but rest assured
Of the reality of those sweet dreams,
And entrance sometime to those fair retreats. ”

He answered, taking up the argument :
“ It does not yet appear what we shall be.
As the Sun’s light obscures the light of stars,—
The brilliant constellations of the heavens,
Which, if the darkness did not intervene,
Would never to our eyes be visible
And we would only know the sapphire dome
By the horizon rimmed surrounding us :
So yet our vision, in the world of sense,
Waits for the passing of what now obscures
Or lies between us and the Spirit-world.

But we have seen a part, and what remains
Will fall within our vision as we do

The Colloquy

Love's works and rise to grander moral heights;
Each traveler now on his weary way,
Like Bunyan's pilgrim, sometimes gaining sight
Of Beulah and the Mount Delectable;
At times of that fair city upon high,
Not made by hands, whose builder is the Lord;
At times, at last, as martyred Stephen saw,
All Heaven and glory opened to our view.

Though still by faith more than by sight we walk,
We have made gain upon this pilgrimage
And nearer is the refuge which we seek,—
That immortality not far from us,
That immortality to which our works,
Or good or ill, will follow after us.

O Lord, thou askest but thine own. So prayed
St. Augustine and did confess: *Our souls*
Are restless, waiting their return to thee,
Since for thyself thou hast created us.

VI

Dost still ask what thou art ? what thou wilt be ?
If fallen soul in earthly prison-house ?
If a mute force seeking self-consciousness ?
Or monad struggling up to Infinite ?
Waitest some miracle that will transform
And make thee other than thou art ? Thyself
Bearest the history,—life as evolved
In the long evolutionary strife.
What thou art now is type and prophecy,

Conversation XVIII

Of what thou yet wilt be. The spiritual
And natural are in accord. Along
With kosmical development is seen
Coöperating intellect—the Soul
All-Immanent, and later man's free will
And self-advance. The wearisome ascent,
Halting and slow, of thy long ancestry
Thou mayst accelerate and sooner mount
What yet impedes thy way, and overcome.
True, we are of the elements, clothed on
By them and limited, yet free to choose
What we would do; wise as the fabled pair,
Who of the Tree of Knowledge took and ate
And knew the good from evil, all become,
Attaining, even now, those high ideals
And glory which the prophets have foretold.

And hast thou still occasion to deplore
The gods and dæmons fallen from their thrones ?
He lives who was and is and is to come.
For though the numberless divinities,
Worshiped and feared these ages long, are gone,
Lost with the Fable-World and Fairy-land,
In what is Heaven or Earth the poorer now,
Since the All-Father yet remains to us ?
Though all the oracles are dumb and faiths
Bear not the light of free inquiry now,
Judgment and Law no less prevail on Earth,—
As not at Sinai or Olympos seen,
Enlightenment and the humanities.
Though all our creeds should fail and sacraments,
In company with old idolatries,

The Colloquy

Their ceremonies, orgies, ecstacies,
Truth yet remains to us and kindly Hope,
Redeeming Love and Reason's ample light.
Though sacred books should fail, the life remains
And God incarnate in the human soul.

VII

We look above, below, before, around,
And find him not. Yet he is present here,
God hidden in all beings, life in all,
And dwelling, as a witness, in all minds.

Infinite Spirit of the Universe,
Who art in all, all things comprised in thee,
Yet from whose being none may lift the veil,
Nor wisest ever think to comprehend.
Thou secret of all secrets! Mystery
Of the Unknowable, Unsearchable!
Hidden, invisible, yet manifest,
How wondrously in all phenomena,
Chemic and vital force and intellect.
Thou who the everlasting Father art
Of every creature born in every world,
Who, when we asked not, knew not, didst confer
Innumerable blessings on our kind.
Thou art the understanding of the wise,
The excellence and virtue of the good,
The power and the glory of the great,
Light of our eyes and voice of every speech,
Thought of the brain and flowing of the blood,
Our aspiration, hope, perfection gained.

Conversation XVIII

Thou art the radiance of countless suns,
Mold of the crystal, color of the leaf,
The form and energy of elements
And gravity depending every world.

O vast Divine! whence everything has come,
What may we ask, that thou hast not bestowed,
Who givest every good and perfect gift ?
What gifts return to thee ? what gratitude
Express in hymn and offering of thanks,
Since, Lord, to serve thee is our own delight ?

We praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee
To be the Lord. We bless, we worship thee,
We glorify thee, we give thanks to thee
For thy great glory, who alone art God.
Be thou exalted higher than the heavens,
Thy glory over all that is in Earth.
O that all men would praise the Lord, our God!
People, as congregations worshiping,
In chant, in psalm, in song, with gladsome voice
And instruments harmoniously tuned,
Praise ye the Lord and magnify his name.
Ye sainted ones and blessed, to glory gone,
Who by the Tree of Life or Crystal Sea
Or in the Golden City take abode,
Hymn to the Father praise unceasingly.
Ye angels, Kherubim, and Seraphim,
Ye Virtues, Powers, and Authorities,
To him, the infinite in majesty,
Ascribe all praise, all adoration give.
Ye seasons of the year and day and night,

The Colloquy

That come and go continually, praise him
In march responsive to eternal rhythm.
Praise him, ye woods, that murmur with the wind;
Praise him, ye vales, perennially in bloom,
Ye mists, that gather on the mountain tops,
Ye fleecy clouds and many tinted skies,
Ye waves, that rise upon the mighty deeps,
Ye stars, that give your light to milliard worlds.
Praise him, all creatures that inhabit Earth,—
Ye wingéd people, in sweet overture
From meadow and in leafy covert hid,
Praise him who has dominion of the air,
Bearing you softly o'er its wide expanse.
Cicada, in the stillness of the night,
And honey-insects, canopied in flowers,
Make joyful noise and sound the praise of God.
Let Universal Nature sing and praise
The Father's name; world without end. Amen.

CONVERSATION XVIII

RESTATEMENTS. BY THE TEACHER

I

*That happens now which in eternity
Ideally was foreordained to be,
And series of events the thread have spun
Whereby our life's meandering course has run.*

So wrote the Stoic emperor who saw
A Universe of social parts and law,—
In all an immanent intelligence
And order, unity, and providence;—

An organism with every part employed,
The densest solid and the seeming void;
Becoming one while other disappears,
The whole abiding through the ceaseless years.

Wouldst know what was the first? what will be
last?

Thou the epitome of all the past;
Prophetic thou of all that yet will be,—
Know thyself and thou know'st Infinity.

The Colloquy

Dost weep ? Dost murmur ? Wouldst complain of
Fate ?

Weak mortal, bearing thus all being's weight !
To weep is human-like and to despair,
Godlike it is to suffer and to bear.

Art told it is a curse that thou dost live ?
Strive of thyself some good account to give.
What treasure hidden in this clod of Earth !
May be one talent or five talents' worth,

Or priceless gem committed to thy trust,
Came it from shining star or grimy dust,
Do thou increase it, keep in purity,
Until the lender asks return of thee.

Nor for the ills of life make thy lament,
Nor mourn that death to one, to all, is sent ;
Death is adaptive, not a penalty,
A mercy and not a calamity,

Permitting life's increase and happiness
Of generations coming to possess
Their share of time, then, going too their way,
Continue the succession endlessly.

Ourselves upon the Earth had not found space
But that through death one gives to other place ;
Infirm and sated Age yields up the strife
And Youth, untiring, is the heir to life.

Conversation XVIII

The dying yield to Nature but her own,—
Sweet flowers bloom where the sere leaves were
blown

And the rich vine and plenteous harvests grow,
Whose roots are nourished by the dead below.

*Ah me, we say, that least there is should give
Its life in pain that other one may live !*
Yet find here what must else be sought in vain—
The nourishment that doth all life sustain.

Although we see not nor can comprehend,
Each part that is accomplishes its end;
And Nature as a whole is found to be
Perfection of completeness, harmony.

II

Such is the order and the plan of things,
Which last, to all, full compensation brings;
All toiling, striving, suffering the pain,
Contributing, each one, to other's gain.

As one before me has computed it—
All having somehow, somewhere, benefit;
Even the loss made credit in account,—
As loss and gain one aggregate amount.

Nay, not for sin's sake only, as some show,
Are we born in the world of strife and woe,
But in the darkness sent our light to try,—
To test in loathing mire our purity.

The Colloquy

Thou askest : “ Why does God cast us away,
“ If we are his, in helpless infancy ?
“ Why plan for us this wearisome ascent,
“ In æons measuring our banishment ?

“ To swirling chaos first commit our care,
“ To flame and wave and to mephitic air ;
“ Or laid, as feeble germs in ooze and slime,
“ A single cell to wait long-nursing Time ?

“ Or to such low beginning doom each kind ?
“ Nourish, in the brute brain, the human mind ?
“ Or, when providing for the highest life,
“ Evolve these animalisms and set at strife ?

“ His children, if for Heaven he would prepare,
“ Why not at very first have placed us there ?
“ As parent, why not to his own revealed
“ And not from all unsearchably concealed ? ”

It is that man has needs, more than the good
As we have measured it,—of fortitude,
Of heroism, denial, sacrifice—
The discipline we oftenest despise.

God knew the excellence of savagery
Compared with satisfying luxury,
Dwelling as near man in that low estate,
As now with wealthy, privileged, and great.

Nor we, living in lowest form, were sent
Away from him in utter banishment ;

Conversation XVIII

For least things living lives as near to him
As flaming Kherubim and Seraphim.

III

Deep the inquiry, *How came we to live?*
Vast speculation, the reply we give!
But near each one of us the answer lies,—
Is in the very dust which we despise:

For in the dust, thought lifeless, is concealed
What in the highest life there is revealed.
God is in all and does to all supply
A vital and transforming energy.

Omniscient is the order which we see,—
Continuous, transmuting agency;
Or forming crystal, cell, bud, leaf, and grain,
Or mind evolving in the nerve and brain.

God is in all,—in Nature's vast profound,
In least, in limitless, his being found;
Ourselves in his resplendent brightness shown,—
The life of God reflected in our own.

There is a temple closing us about,—
God is within it and he is without,
Not visible, but a sweet consciousness,—
Communion, solace, comfort, tenderness.

I have the sense of God, of Heaven's deep joy,
Of self,—none can this consciousness destroy.
I was before this outward house of woe
And born to Love, to Love Eternal go.

The Colloquy

IV

Art still disquieted ? What thou wouldst be,
Like desert mirage vanishing from thee ?
Trust thou in God, the one reality,
Whom, if thou wouldst, thou couldst not put away.

God is,—nor Psalmist nor the Seer of old
Nor ever Saint his providence has told ;
Who, taking from us all, gives us yet more,
For loss in Time Eternity's rich store.

Who, for the soul here burdened with distress,
Offers the gift of ceaseless happiness ;
For farthest traveler has this surprise,
To sleep Death's sleep and wake in Paradise."

CONVERSATION XIX

MINISTRIES

I

WHEN the teacher to a close
Brought his speech, a mystic rose
In the Chapel, to extend
Comment pertinent and lend
Knowledge only inly seen,—
(Surest guide though that has been;)—
Or he would set forth the scheme
That shall perfect and redeem—
Plan by Loving Kindness made,
But through Pain and Sorrow laid.

“ First,” he said, “ I will review
Other’s work, then raise up new.

As the Eremite has told,
There are evils manifold :—
Countless ills and countless foes,
Countless wrongs and countless woes,—
Toil, want, war, calamity,
Death upon us in the way,

The Colloquy

And all that is visible,
Evanescent, changeable.

Yet the Heaven and Earth remain,—
That which wastes builds up again,
Change itself the permanent,
Causing, keeping, provident.
As in fashion we adorn,
Putting off the old and worn,
So the Kosmos puts away
Old and worn and dead each day,
For the morrow's grander view
Of things beautiful and new.

And in this take courage, heart :
Not of all is lost least part,
For in least thing that exists,
Infinite selfhood subsists.
And not any wrong or sin
But this self is dwelling in,—
Judges it, condemns, destroys,
Or to purify employs.
It is this, (least understood,)
That from evil brings forth good ;
Overrules usurping Might,
Makes for Virtue and for Right.
As from Epictetus heard,
Virtue is its own reward
And Vice has this consequent—
Bringing its own punishment ;
As the poet Æschylus
Nemesis unveils to us,

Conversation 𐬰𐬀𐬭𐬀

Showing that each guilty deed
Holds within itself the seed
Of its punishment and cure.
And, though seeming ever sure,
Ahriman's long reign of woe,
Certain is its overthrow.
Or the evil itself tends
To the happiest of ends,
In that through the wrong and pain
Virtue, Truth, and Love have gain:
And our loss and suffering
Are swift animals to bring
The perfection we would win,—
And the loathéd, baleful sin,
Servant, too, of moral laws,
The soul's chariot Heavenward draws.
As the Concord poet-seer,
Writing on this, has made clear:
Good and Evil, Love and Crime,
Going side by side through Time,
Tending both to the same goal—
Good, at last, of every soul.

Sinners, saints, together go
Through this pilgrimage of woe;
Sinners, saints, as soon, as late,
Pass together Heaven's high gate.

II

There is one and only force
Regnant in the Universe,

The Colloquy

Love that prisoned would not stay,
That leads all on Upward Way:
That in endless surge and strife
Kindles, keeps the flame of life
Or begets and brings to birth
Whatsoe'er has life on Earth,—
Blade and leaf and stalk and flower,
Germs and seeds, with latent power
To produce and bear their own,
O'er the wide land thickly sown,
And of moving, sentient forms,
Those interminable swarms.
God, at first, ordained it so
Love should on this errand go:
Lord of Love would have us come
To him as the final home;
Or the soul seeks its retreat
In the Lord, its native seat.

III

Though, with strong persistency,
Fraud repeats her ancient lie,
As we Light and Reason heed,
Truth is found and honest deed.

To none God shows enmity,
Unto none partiality;
Wisdom, blessedness, and grace
Are not of a chosen race.
Not one faith or formula,
Only, marks the perfect way:

Conversation 𐌹𐌺𐌹

To all nations God has given
Guides to lead the way to Heaven,—
Prophets, Leaders, Saviors, Sages,
Suited to all climes and ages.

Nor needs he one to proclaim
Or reveal his glorious name,
Nor one coming here to tell
In what far world he doth dwell
When all life shows him to be
Present, acting ceaselessly,—
When the Heaven and Earth declare,
God is, and is everywhere.

Never aught from nothing springs,
Cause there must be for all things;
God could not of nothing take
Whereof Earth and man to make.

Such the deep-laid mystery
Of Divine Economy,—
Interwoven thus each part,
Seemingly by magic art,
That whatever is depends
On all else that with it blends.
Part I am of earth, sea, sky,—
Whate'er fills immensity;
And all these are part of me,
Atom, or Infinity.
Though from God all things proceed,
He of all become has need;
Atom lost, then lost the whole,—

The Colloquy

Death of one, of every soul.
Not a moment could we live
If the life he did not give,
Nor could God himself exist
If naught did in him subsist.
I need God and without me
Hurled from throne himself would be.

Paradoxal as may seem
I have always been with him,
Yet am separate, alone,—
Do what he would not have done:
In the cycle of Free Will
Choosing good or choosing ill,—
Free to sin and to rebel,
To take up my bed in Hell;
Yet once there, as surely he
Will go and abide with me,
Nor the awful æons wait
Me in Heaven to reinstate;
For as shame and penitence
Humble me, in eminence
He will afterward exalt;
Or I will for selfish thought,
Vain and proud, as low be brought.

Nor is our probation done,
Having lost here, having won:
Earth has not had all our life,
Death ends not the spirit's strife,—
What at death is incomplete
Future has to finish it.

Conversation 𐄂𐄂𐄂

IV

Wouldst thou know our destiny ?
Each takes to Eternity
What he is. Ourselves to know
Would eternal record show.
As we write the diary,
Good or evil of each day,
The Recording Angel takes
These same acts and record makes,—
Not on ample page the name
Of pure life and without blame,—
Not upon a fatal scroll
Name of any damnéd soul,
But upon ourselves the worth
Of each day lived on the Earth ;—
Ineffaceable each fact,
Every thought, desire, and act,
Sum of deeds in character
As we do the right or err.

Somewhat, too, Necessity
Moves the wheel that turns the clay,
Molds, thus, everything that is
As best suits its purposes ;
Shapes to the divine man's life
Through the trial here and strife ;—
Misshaped vessel, twisted, marred,
Most unseemly rough and scarred,
Dwarfed and darkenéd by sin,
But for jewel held within
Counted this vexed lump of earth,
Of incomparable worth.

The Colloquy

V

Askest, ' Where is victory
When strife wages endlessly ?
When wrongs crushed, when tyrants slain,
Like Antæos rise again ?
When the wars that we have won
Other wars are bringing on ?
When, not so much hindereth
Toil and wrong and war and death,
As doth brutish ignorance,—
Custom that will not advance,—
Faith that looks but to the past
Or to ruin at the last ? '
Yet to him who sees and learns,
Whose soul for the better yearns,
Dawns the fair, triumphant day
Of man's right, equality,
Exercise of liberty,
Progress, peace, fraternity.

True, as seen, the world has need
Now of great heroic deed ;
Bravest ones to battle wrong,
Words of fire in speech and song,
Voice for right and liberty,
Faith in God more verily :—
On the foe the quick advance
For the world's deliverance.
Would I might in full make known
All I had in vision shown,
As I saw the bitter strife
Here involving every life ;

Conversation 卅卅

What was lost, what has been won
Since the struggle was begun,
What the conquests yet to win
Ere the end of wrong and sin.

VI

Rest we, here, our argument—
With the world, with life content.
Looking back, what doth remain
Now to us of ill or pain ?
As once Job account did give,
Wrong and loss are relative,—
The most of our suffering
In our own imagining:
And the whole humanity,
Wending on the Upward Way
In delusion oftenest
Of the good it had in quest;—
Man's first freedom but rewon
After all the war is done;
With all idols overthrown
Man's first faith in God made known;
With all speculation tried,
What is claimed and what denied,
Nothing else doth satisfy
As Truth, Love, Right, Liberty,
God and Immortality.
What is fullest happiness ?
What is peace and blessedness ?
Happy knowing one loves thee,
Happy knowing thou art free,

The Colloquy

Happy as full hope is given
Of Eternal life in Heaven.”

The Mystic having ended his discourse
All those assembled in the Chapel said,
Amen, though waiting my conclusion yet,
When the good Seer would lift his blameless hands
And ask the Father’s blessing on the World.

CONVERSATION XX

ENLIGHTENMENT

I

ONE had said I should be told
How I came to be,
Should read, as on a scroll unrolled,
My destiny.

Out of the slimy seas,
Out of the murky Earth
Out of the flaming Sun,
Out of the fire-mists, ere one
Of Heaven's bright orbs its cycle had begun,
Out of the mind, before all these,
Was my birth.

I was not at the first in the dark womb,
I will not lie at last in the dread tomb;
I am not by the Kosmos bound
But through its changeful round
Continuing
In sentient being,—
Striving
Ascending
Ascent unending.

The Colloquy

Yet comes the Night of Rest,
Comes the Sabbath Day,
Comes the year of Jubilee;
Comes to weary, burdened one,
Saddened, wretched, and undone,
Death to set the Spirit free.
He, who in very restlessness,
Brings forth to strife, takes to His breast
All sorrow and distress.

II

Did I not know Him,
When Earth was yet to be ?
And shall I fear to go to Him,
Who ever was with me ?
I had no fear
When coming here,
And knowing that I cannot stay,
Why do I dread to go away ?
But Earth still holds me
And makes me cowardly,
And Sin would have me trembling go
Into His presence. No,
Sharing with Him the past eternity,
Futurity
Can have no dread,
Nor any limbo of the dead
Lie in the way
Where endlessly
Progress and gain open their gates to me.

Conversation 𐆆

III

Lo! now I hear
As of one near
To me
But speaking out of deep infinity,
Bidding mine inquiry cease,
Saying, *Peace*
I give to thee.

IV

Amen! Amen!
Not again
May we all meet, till before Him
Whose purity
Pales the glory
Of Kherubim and Seraphim.

Amen! Amen!
Then,
Leaving behind the strife and woe
And singing as we go
The gladsome way,
Until on High
We join the angels of God who never die.

Amen! Amen!
Even the dæmons yield to Him
Who is eternal over all
And put their evil under them
And sin and grievous fall,

The Colloquy

Rising again to light
And Heavenly purity in azure height.

Amen! Amen!
To Him that is and was and faileth never
Be praise ascribed, now and forever.
Amen! Amen!

THE END



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